

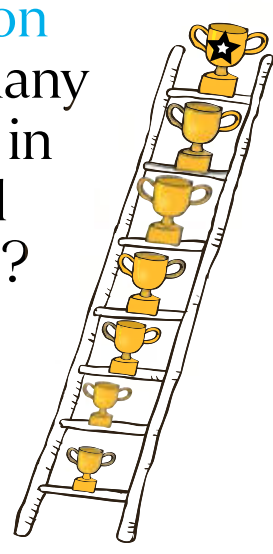
THE STRAITS TIMES

Life ST's Oscar picks D1&2



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high
B1



Raft of measures to help relieve burden of caregivers

Aid ranging from new grant to respite care services to be rolled out over two years

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

A slew of measures will be rolled out over two years to help Singaporeans who care for the old, the sick and the disabled.

These include a new \$200 grant to offset costs of care, more respite care options and the loosening of restrictions on Medisave funds for people to help pay for their siblings' care.

The announcement was made by Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong at a marathon seven-hour Parliament session yesterday, during which 25 MPs and six office-holders spoke at length about the importance of helping Singaporeans age well and ensuring their caregivers receive adequate support amid a greying nation.

Many shared anecdotes of personal encounters with burnt-out caregivers who sought their help.

The measures in the new Caregiver Support Action Plan come four months after the Health Ministry said it was going to review the caregiver support system.

At least six measures to help ease

What's in support action plan

GETTING CARE

- More counters for caregivers, seniors to get information
- Singapore Silver Pages to be revamped

FINANCIAL

- \$200 a month grant to defray costs, replacing foreign domestic worker grant of \$120
- Medisave can be used to cover siblings' healthcare expenses

SOCIAL

- Community support and training for caregivers

RESPIRE

- Pilot night care service for seniors with dementia so their caregivers can rest, and home-based care for terminally ill patients.

WORKPLACE

- Increased budget for Work-Life Grant to encourage flexible work arrangements



INSIDE

Suggestions from MPs
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Amy Khor on empowering seniors A7

Workplace support for caregivers, seniors A8

the burden on caregivers will be launched under the plan, including a means-tested Home Caregiving Grant to be introduced by the end of this year.

The \$200 monthly grant will replace the existing \$120 Foreign Do-

mestic Worker Grant, and will give caregivers greater flexibility in how to use the money. Anyone with permanent moderate disabilities will be eligible, regardless of age.

By the end of this year, people can also use their Medisave funds

to pay for the healthcare expenses of their Singaporean siblings.

The Agency for Integrated Care, which coordinates eldercare schemes, will also launch three pilot schemes to expand respite care options. These include a night service

for caregivers of dementia patients and a home-based service for cancer patients receiving palliative care.

It will also try out a pre-enrolment system at certain senior care centres and nursing homes so that respite services can be activated at

short notice, if necessary.

The ministry will also set up more caregiver support networks and make it easier for people to access the services they need, said Mr Tong. More details will be given in the coming months.

By 2030, one in four Singapore residents will be 65 and older, and informal caregiving arrangements will grow as the population ages.

Given Singapore's demographic profile, Mr Tong said his speech focused mainly on help for those caring for the elderly "as a start".

But there is a "broad range of caregivers who operate in a variety of different circumstances and a very broad landscape", he added.

"Their needs are diverse, as with their own particular family or caregiving circumstances, so over time we will need to look carefully at what these needs are, and whether further assistance might be needed."

At yesterday's session, the MPs also recounted stories about seniors living their golden years with energy and aplomb as they discussed how to help this group age in good health and with financial stability.

Suggestions they made included providing more work and volunteering opportunities for seniors who want them and assisted living options in both Housing Board and private housing developments.

Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-jin neatly summarised the main thrust of the debate by noting how there has been much talk about the impending multi-billion-dollar Merdeka Generation Package to help Singaporeans born in the 1950s with their healthcare expenses.

"I think it is instructive to remember that *merdeka* means freedom and independence, and that is an aspiration I think we are all aspiring to, in the way we realise our older years as a nation," he said.

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EU votes in favour of landmark FTA with S'pore

The European Parliament has voted in support of a landmark trade deal with Singapore that will remove nearly all Customs duties between the two jurisdictions.

A majority vote in favour of the European Union-Singapore Free

Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) yesterday in France paves the way for the pact to be ratified. When in force, the EUSFTA will eliminate duties on 84 per cent of Singapore exports to the EU.

Two other pacts, including an

Investment Protection Agreement (IPA), received support yesterday as well.

Calling this an important milestone in Singapore's bilateral relations with the EU, Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran said the EUSFTA and IPA will bring economic benefits to Singapore, in particular its smaller companies.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A5

S'pore rebuts claims by American in HIV data leak

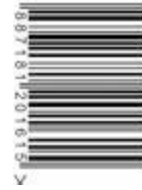
Baseless allegations made against the Singapore authorities by Mikhy Farrera Brochez, the American at the centre of the HIV Registry data leak, show him to be a pathological liar, the Singapore Police Force and Singapore Prison Service said in a statement yesterday. They were rebutting claims he made on Facebook

over his role in the data leak, his HIV-positive status and his time in jail.

In a separate statement, the Ministry of Health said it would be working with the police on appropriate actions over Brochez's threat to reveal the confidential data in future.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

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10

must-reads
for today

1 Tackling Hub's issues
National agency Sport Singapore says it is working with SportsHub Pte Ltd to "get to the nub" of issues that have plagued the facility since it opened in 2014. The \$1.33 billion venue was in the news recently after its chief executive officer Oon Jin Teik abruptly resigned, raising the question of whether all was well in the consortium.
SPORT C10



People canoeing at the Sports Hub's Water Sports Centre. Sports Hub CEO Oon Jin Teik unexpectedly resigned on Jan 28. PHOTO: SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB

2 More help for caregivers
To help Singaporeans care for the aged, the infirm and the disabled, a range of measures, such as a new grant and loosening restrictions on Medisave funds, will be introduced in the next two years. The changes are part of a new Caregiver Support Action Plan. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

3 Household incomes up
Families with at least one member who works, which make up nearly 90 per cent of households, earned more last year, with median incomes from employment rising by 2.6 per cent to \$9,293. Economists said the increase was due to the economy logging better-than-expected growth in the first half of last year, as well as relatively low inflation. **TOP OF THE NEWS A4**

4 Setback for opposition
Thailand's Election Commission says it is seeking the disqualification of the Thai Raksa Chart Party, which nominated a princess for prime minister, in a potential setback for the opposition loyal to ousted former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The commission had disqualified Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya on Monday. **WORLD A10**

Thai Raksa Chart Party leader Preechapol Pongpanit speaking to journalists on Tuesday.
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

5 US-China ties under threat
The United States risks a breakdown in its relationship with China as it pushes back against Chinese actions that contravene international norms, a group of China specialists and former top officials has warned. **WORLD A14**

6 Trophy for coming in 8th?
Recent changes to the National School Games will see more participants in sport being recognised. But giving out broad-based awards could also blunt the edge of competition and the drive for excellence in sport, says sport reporter Nicole Chia (below). **OPINION A22**

7 Holding bystanders liable
Lawyers and experts welcomed the new provisions proposed in Parliament that spelt out punishments for bystanders who know but do nothing to prevent the neglect or abuse of maids, young children and the mentally or physically infirm. Although the move is a step in the right direction, some expressed concern that there might be difficulty in enforcement. **HOME B2**

8 Upset over Deliveroo fees
Some Deliveroo customers are upset by the re-introduction of a "small order fee" to their orders. They said they had not received any e-mail or in-app notice about the new fees, which began last month and can go up to \$5 for orders under \$10. **HOME B3**

9 Premium office rentals up
Tightening vacancies helped Grade A offices in the Central Business District notch the highest annual rental growth since 2010. The Shenton Way/Tanjong Pagar and Beach Road markets saw the largest rental increases last year. **BUSINESS C1**

10 A contemporary touch
It may be set in 18th-century England, but The Favourite – a movie about two female courtiers vying for the affections of capricious Queen Anne – feels strangely contemporary in its tale of political intrigue, hidden love and loneliness at the top. **LIFE D3**

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VIDEO
Singaporean of the Year
Ms Siti Noor Mastura, 28, who co-founded non-profit organisation Interfaith Youth Circle, is The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year for 2018. Check out the award presentation and her acceptance speech. <http://str.sg/mastura>

PODCAST
Tips for HDB flat buyers
ST talks to sisters Rhonda and Race Wong, co-founders of property platform Ohmyhome, which aims to make housing transactions simple, faster and more affordable. <http://str.sg/HDBtips>

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Incomes up for S'pore households last year

Growth attributed to economy doing better than expected in first half of 2018

Rachel Au-Yong
Political Correspondent

Singapore families earned more from work per person last year, with some top earners surpassing the median growth rate because they were likely in industries plugged into the new digital economy.

The median monthly income per household member rose to \$2,792 last year, 3.4 per cent more on a dollar basis or a 3 per cent increase after taking inflation into account, according to the latest household income figures released by the Department of Statistics yesterday.

The increase was especially pronounced for families in the top 11 per cent to 29 per cent range (the 71st to 90th percentiles), who saw their real incomes rise by 4 per cent for each household member.

Those in the bottom 70 per cent saw their incomes grow from between 2.5 per cent and 3.4 per cent per household member, while the top 10 per cent saw their incomes rise 2.3 per cent per household member.

The average monthly income per member ranged from \$570 for the bottom 10 per cent to \$13,581 for the top 10 per cent.

Household income from work includes Central Provident Fund contributions from employers, but excludes income from other sources such as dividends and rent. It also does not count maids' wages.

Altogether, families with at least one working member – which make up almost nine-tenths of all households here – saw real median employment income grow by 2.6 per cent to \$9,293 last year, compared with 1.5 per cent growth in 2017.

Economists attributed the across-the-board increase to the economy logging better-than-expected growth in the first half of last year, as well as the relatively low inflation.

As for why the top 11 per cent to 29 per cent of families saw incomes grow more, CIMB Private Banking



The median monthly income per household member rose to \$2,792 last year, 3.4 per cent more on a dollar basis or a 3 per cent increase after taking inflation into account, according to the latest household income figures. Altogether, families with at least one working member saw real median employment income grow by 2.6 per cent to \$9,293 last year. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

economist Song Seng Wun said employed people in these households may be professionals in sectors with higher demand, like IT and fintech.

Last year also saw the Gini coefficient – a measure of income inequality from zero to one, with zero being most equal – stay largely the same at 0.458, compared with 2017's 0.459.

The Gini coefficient last year matched that of 2016, which was the lowest in a decade. It dropped to

0.404 after adjusting for government transfers and taxes.

Public schemes gave out an average of \$4,494 to each resident household member last year. This was \$9 lower, on average, than in 2017, due to a drop in MediShield Life transitional subsidies and the absence of one-off grants like NS50 vouchers.

Residents in one- and two-room Housing Board flats continued to receive, on average, \$10,347 in such

transfers – more than double those in other types of properties.

About 12.1 per cent of households were made up entirely of people who were not working, which was mainly due to the rising share of ageing Singaporeans.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser noted that the Gini coefficient has been stable over the past few years, after it came down from the peak in 2012. "It

could go lower, but through something we are less inclined to try in a big way – redistributive measures."

He said another means of minimising inequality is by raising the bottom through skills upgrading and creating more value-added jobs, adding: "However, this takes time."

News of the income growth was of cold comfort to a 32-year-old customer relations manager who wanted to be known only as Mrs

Tan. The mother of a three-year-old boy received a pay rise of \$320 last year, which she said worked out to an increase of about 7 per cent.

"Percentage-wise, I guess you can say it is good. But when you add up the cost of raising your kid and taking care of your parents, it does not feel like we will be relaxing any time soon," she said.

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Police, prisons deny allegations by American at centre of HIV data leak

Fabian Koh
and Rei Kurohi

The Government has denied allegations made by Mikhy Farrera Brochez, the American at the centre of the HIV Registry data leak.

In several Facebook posts yesterday morning, Brochez claimed, among other things, that he was abused while in police custody; that he was sexually assaulted while in prison and contracted HIV only then; that he was denied HIV medication while in jail; and that the registry was leaked by another person.

His posts came after Health Minister Gan Kim Yong gave a ministerial statement in Parliament on Tuesday explaining how the registry had fallen into Brochez's hands, the events leading up to Brochez leaking the information online, and the steps the authorities have since taken to manage the leak.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) revealed the data breach on Jan 28, six days after discovering that Brochez had leaked online the details of 14,200 people diagnosed with HIV here since 1985. Brochez had been deported last year after serving a jail term for other offences and is in the United States.

An MOH statement yesterday said Brochez "continues to make allegations which are either false or unsubstantiated". It said the matter had been thoroughly investigated by both the ministry and the police. "Brochez was convicted in court of

fraud and various drug offences. Should new evidence emerge, we will investigate accordingly."

MOH added that it had previously indicated Brochez may be in possession of further information that he could reveal in the future. "He has now threatened to do so, and MOH will work with the police to take appropriate actions," it said, referring to Brochez's Facebook posts.

In a joint statement, the Singapore Police Force and Singapore Prison Service responded to some of Brochez's other allegations.

On the claim that the HIV Registry was leaked by one Zachary Levine, the statement said the police investigated Mr Levine in 2016 following similar allegations by Brochez.

It read: "Police investigation, which included an interview and examination of Levine's electronic devices seized from his residence, did not reveal any evidence to suggest that (he) was in possession of any MOH-related files, or had shared any HIV Registry data."

It added that before 2016, Brochez claimed in correspondence with MOH that his partner Ler Teck Siang and Mr Levine had shared screenshots of Brochez's own record in the HIV Registry, "but Brochez was never able to produce verifiable evidence to support this claim".

Ler, 37, a Singaporean doctor who was Brochez's live-in partner, is facing a charge under the Official Secrets Act for failing to properly handle information from the HIV Registry that he had access to as

head of the National Public Health Unit up to May 2013.

Brochez also claimed he had been abused in police custody and that he had been sexually assaulted in prison and contracted HIV there.

The statement said these claims had been investigated and found to be untrue by the police's Internal Affairs Office and the Criminal Investigation Department. It added that Brochez had "committed a litany of institutional offences, including assaulting a fellow inmate" in prison.

The authorities said that when Brochez was admitted into prison in June 2016, he declared he had been HIV positive since 2008.

They said it was untrue he was denied HIV medication to manage his condition while in jail, adding that it is "a matter of record" that Brochez had contracted HIV years before he went to jail here in 2016.

"He, however, refused to submit himself for the necessary blood tests for the purposes of ascertaining his medical condition and of treatment," the statement said.

Given his refusal, the prison eventually checked with MOH and subsequently provided him with the necessary medication.

The statement said the Attorney-General's Chambers did not interfere with his medical treatment and had no authority to do so. "Brochez had been tried and found guilty by the Singapore courts. He was accorded due legal process," it said. "He has now made baseless allegations about the investigations as well



as against the police and prisons. His actions have shown him to be a pathological liar. Nevertheless, we welcome him to come back to Singapore to assist with police investigations."

Dr Leong Hoe Nam, an infectious disease specialist who treated Brochez in prison, also denied allegations he had given the American a list of HIV-positive prisoners or told him that he did not have HIV.

Dr Leong said he never had such a list and it would have been impossible to give Brochez any kind of written material, given the tight security. "I strongly object to what Mikhy has alleged. Both the prison service and myself discharged our duties fully and with no bias or stigma," Dr Leong said. "Medical confidentiality and patient care were always at the top of our minds. These accusations go against the very fabric of our values."

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Mikhy Farrera Brochez claimed that he was abused while in police custody; that he was sexually assaulted while in prison and contracted HIV only then; that he was denied HIV medication while in jail; and that the HIV Registry was leaked by another person.
ST FILE PHOTO

Brochez's account of events convoluted, nearly impossible to verify: US news outlet

Besides his Facebook posts, American Mikhy Farrera Brochez also gave an interview to a US news outlet on his run-ins with the law in Singapore and his role in the HIV Registry data leak.

US-based news website Vice News reported yesterday that, according to e-mails viewed by its reporters, Brochez e-mailed Google Drive links for what he said was the HIV Registry to an e-mail address associated with the Supreme Court in Singapore.

It also reported that several members of the Singapore government, the Attorney-General's Chambers, an official with the US State Department and a senior editor at CNN's Hong Kong bureau were also copied in that e-mail.

Vice News said that Brochez also offered to show it the HIV Registry multiple times. But it declined to view the registry data given that it contained private medical information.

Vice reported that in September last year, Brochez sent a separate e-mail containing a similar link to the editor-in-chief of The Straits Times (ST).

ST editor Warren Fernandez confirmed last night that he did receive e-mails from Brochez last year. These were sent in May and June, and not September, as reported by Vice News.

As is its usual practice in following up on such leads, the newsroom looked into them, but it could not corroborate the allegations made by him.

The Vice report yesterday also described Brochez's accounts of events as "convoluted and nearly impossible to verify in full, particularly since the details often shift in the retelling".

Green light for European Union's FTA with Singapore

Pact will do away with nearly all Customs duties; two more agreements with S'pore get go-ahead

Seow Bei Yi
Business Correspondent

The European Parliament has given the green light to a landmark trade agreement with Singapore that is set to remove nearly all Customs duties between the two jurisdictions.

Following a majority vote in favour of the European Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) yesterday in France, the pact can be ratified and come into force. Two other agreements were also given the go-ahead.

Calling this an important milestone in Singapore's bilateral relations with the EU, Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran said that "Singapore and EU companies, in particular our small and medium-sized enterprises, can look forward to significant benefits from the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers".

The EUSFTA eliminates duties, allowing 84 per cent of Singapore exports to enter the EU duty-free once it comes into force. This includes that on Asian food products and electronics.

Further benefits include having material from Asean deemed as originating from Singapore when incorporated into certain final products, enabling these items to qualify for preferential tariff treatment.

Singapore will remove remaining tariffs on EU products and commit to retaining current duty-free access for other EU products as well. It will also remove other obstacles such as by recognising the EU's safety tests for cars and electronic appliances.

There are more than 10,000 European companies in Singapore, and the EU is Singapore's third largest trading partner.

Two other deals with Singapore also received majority support in the European Parliament, though they will need to be approved by regional and national Parliaments of member states before they can enter into force.

One of them is the EU-Singapore Investment Protection Agreement (IPA), which will replace 12 existing bilateral investment treaties between Singapore and various EU member states, encouraging investments and setting out rules giving investors protection.

The other is the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which provides a framework to deepen cooperation in key areas, from transport to science and technology.

The FTA and IPA are "strategic pathfinders to an eventual EU-Asean trade and investment agreement", said Mr Iswaran. He added that they underlined a shared commitment to open trade.

The FTA is a positive development given uncertainties on how long US-China trade tensions may last, OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy Selena Ling told The Straits Times. She added that the EU market can provide some buffer to companies here.

The EUSFTA has been over a decade in the making, with European Parliament member and EUSFTA rapporteur David Martin saying in a parliamentary debate on Tuesday that "while (US President) Donald Trump wants to build walls to separate nations, we are... keeping fair and free trade alive".

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmstrom added: "In uncertain times, we need agreements like these more than ever."

Other leaders noted that the Republic is a gateway for EU firms to access economies such as China. They said that as the first bilateral trade pact signed between EU and an Asean country, it could be a model for future agreements with others in the region.

byseow@sph.com.sg

EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement

84%

Singapore exports that can enter the EU tariff-free once the pact comes into force (Asian food products, electronics, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, processed agricultural products)

STRONGER PROTECTION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS:

- Singapore-based producers can collect broadcasting and public performance royalties for productions that are exported into the EU.



IMPROVED MARKET ACCESS TO SERVICES SECTORS:

- Singapore businesses have better market access to a wider range of services sectors in the EU such as:



Professional services



Computer and related services



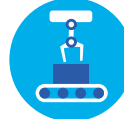
Telecommunication services



Environmental services



Transportation



Manufacturing

The EUSFTA is the first bilateral trade agreement concluded and signed between the European Union (EU) and an Asean country. The following are some of its benefits.

GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT:

- Singapore companies can bid for more government procurement projects in the EU, such as in:



Railway services



Computer services



Telecommunication services



Landscape architecture services

LIBERAL AND FLEXIBLE RULES OF ORIGIN:

- Key products originating in Singapore (either produced or processed) can enter the EU tariff-free.
- Materials from Asean states will be deemed as originating from Singapore when incorporated into certain final products, enabling such products to qualify for preferential tariff treatment.

Source: MTI STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



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Ms Diana Norahman helping her mother up a customised fixed ramp installed at their HDB flat entrance. While the Government is looking at building more integrated developments, many seniors prefer to age in familiar surroundings, noted Senior Parliamentary Secretary for National Development Sun Xueling. Hence, another prong in the Government's strategy is to retrofit existing Housing Board estates to make them senior-friendly. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

What's being done for seniors and people with special needs

4 ministries' officials supplement MOH announcement of schemes

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

The announcement of various new schemes by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Parliament yesterday was supplemented by officials from four ministries spelling out what the Government is doing for seniors and those with special needs, and how they can lead healthy, active lives.

SENIOR HOUSING OPTIONS

Several MPs called for more diverse housing options for seniors, including group homes, assisted living services and developments that integrate both housing and care facilities.

While the Government is looking at building more integrated developments, many seniors prefer to age in familiar surroundings, noted Senior Parliamentary Secretary for National Development Sun Xueling.

Hence, another prong in the Government's strategy is to retrofit existing Housing Board estates to make them senior-friendly.

Already, all common areas in newer HDB estates have features such as ramps and barrier-free routes to make it easier for seniors to move around.

Her ministry is also studying how to ensure that private retirement housing properly caters to the intended demographic, and will give more details in due course.

PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

More will be done to help those with special needs live indepen-

PARENTAL CONCERNS

Parents know that they will not always be able to take care of their children, and they hope that their children will be able to find and hold on to good jobs, and live independently despite their special needs.



MRSAMTAN, Minister of State for Social and Family Development, on helping those with special needs live independently.

dently, said Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sam Tan.

His ministry is aware that many caregivers of special needs students worry about what will happen after their children complete their studies in special needs schools.

"Parents know that they will not always be able to take care of their children, and they hope that their children will be able to find and hold on to good jobs, and live independently despite their special needs," Mr Tan said.

His ministry is studying these issues and will elaborate on its plans in the upcoming parliamentary debate on its budget, he said.

It will also disclose details of plans to provide better social assistance in cases of complex needs.

VOLUNTEERISM

Senior volunteerism rates have

gone up, and seniors have a wealth of experience that they can tap to give back to society.

This includes providing advisory services to voluntary welfare organisations, said Senior Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth Sim Ann.

She gave the example of the Centre for Non-Profit Leadership's BoardMatch programme, which reaches out to professionals across various industries to identify people who can be leaders in non-profit organisations.

The Government is also working with the arts and sports communities to develop activities that help seniors build social bonds and stay healthy as they age, Ms Sim said.

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Companies can retain talent by adopting flexible work arrangements that let valuable employees take time off when needed for family commitments, said Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling.

Her ministry will continue to encourage companies to adopt such flexible arrangements, she said.

Mr Henry Kwek, an MP for Nee Soon GRC, suggested: Why not legislate such arrangements?

Ms Low replied that the Government will first have to study the potential impact of passing such a law.

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Suggestions from MPs to help seniors, caregivers

Adrian Lim and Linette Lai
Political Correspondents

Twenty-five MPs yesterday gave suggestions and urged the Government to do more for seniors and caregivers, as the House debated two motions on helping Singaporeans age with purpose and expanding support for caregivers.

One group, led by Mr Henry Kwek (Nee Soon GRC), advocated a "whole of Singapore effort" to ensure that Singaporeans age with purpose, in good health and with financial stability.

The other group, led by Dr Chia Shi-Lu (Tanjong Pagar GRC), underscored the important role that caregivers play in helping seniors age well and called for more support for this group of people.

Mr Kwek is the vice-chairman of the People's Action Party's Seniors Group, while Dr Chia chairs the

Government Parliamentary Committee for Health.

Here are some suggestions made by the MPs.

For seniors

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK AND VOLUNTEER

Opening the debate on ageing well, Mr Kwek said that many seniors find purpose in work and more opportunities must be created for them to work for as long as they want or are able to.

Ms Lee Bee Wah (Nee Soon GRC) similarly said many elderly people "want to feel useful to society, in a way that is manageable for them".

Ms Tin Pei Ling (MacPherson) called for ageism to be stamped out. The Government can take the lead in testing how the work environment, workflows, job role designs and even compensation and health benefits can be optimised for senior workers, she said.

MORE HOUSING OPTIONS

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar GRC) suggested providing more assisted living options in both Housing Board and private housing developments. "We can either utilise available void-deck space or transform several combined HDB flats into a senior group home with assisted living facilities," she said.

Ms Rahayu Mahzam (Jurong GRC) urged the National Development and Health ministries to look into revising guidelines to enable and promote the setting up of

group homes or retirement homes with assisted living facilities in the private sector.

"This could mean creating a new strata title category and legislation that could ring-fence non-seniors from purchasing such properties and deal with the conversion or transfer of ownership upon demise of the owners," she said.

MAKE WORKPLACES AGE-FRIENDLY
Mr Zainal Sapari (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC) called for building owners to set aside rest spaces for elderly workers, especially for outsourced cleaners, security officers and landscape workers.

This gives them a greater sense



EXPLORE GROUP HOME IDEA

We can either utilise available void-deck space or transform several combined HDB flats into a senior group home with assisted living facilities.



MS JOAN PEREIRA, calling for more assisted living options for seniors.

of dignity and self-worth "knowing that their basic needs are provided for at their work sites", added the assistant secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress.

BOOST ACCESS TO THE ARTS

Citing studies that show that attending or taking part in arts-related events benefits the mental and physical health of the elderly, Nominated MP Terence Ho called for more support and resources from the Government, companies, enterprises and the public to make the arts more accessible for senior citizens.

ROLL OUT TECH HELP

Home-grown technology companies could work with the Government to produce basic smartphones or similar devices with functional features such as electronic payment, said Mr Darryl David (Ang Mo Kio GRC).

These could be made available at a nominal rate for senior citizens and help them stay connected even if they cannot afford a smart device.

For caregivers

PROVIDE MORE FINANCIAL AID

Workers' Party MP Chen Show Mao (Aljunied GRC) wants more financial assistance to be given to caregivers, especially those who give up their jobs to take care of their family members. This could include Central Provident Fund top-ups for those in low-income households, he said.

Mr Christopher de Souza (Hol-

land-Bukit Timah GRC) also suggested that the Government consider a caregiver allowance, particularly for full-time caregivers taking care of an elderly person with disabilities or mental health problems.

OFFER CAREGIVER LEAVE, FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Having caregiver leave and flexible work arrangements can help caregivers better deal with situations when an elderly parent falls ill suddenly, said Dr Chia.

He also called on the Manpower Ministry to examine potential roadblocks to companies implementing flexible work arrangements and work with them to overcome the obstacles.

BEEF UP RESPITE CARE SERVICES

Recounting the experience of a burnt-out caregiver whose father was often active at night because of dementia, Ms Tin called for the provision of respite care beyond the conventional working hours.

ENCOURAGE MORE TO TAKE UP SENIOR-RELATED CAREERS

Take a look at how younger Singaporeans can be encouraged to pursue careers in fields such as gerontology and geriatrics, said Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Ang Mo Kio GRC).

These could include putting in place professional conversion programmes for people who want to make a mid-career switch.

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Mr Henry Kwek (top) called for more work opportunities for seniors, while Dr Chia Shi-Lu (above) spoke of the vital role caregivers play.



Mr Chen Show Mao sought more financial aid for caregivers, especially those who give up jobs to care for their family members.

Seniors to get more help to stay healthy

More efforts to strengthen communities of care and evolve new models of ageing in place

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

Seniors will continue to get more help and programmes to age in place, stay in good health and receive support from care networks, said Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor.

Dr Khor said the Ministry of Health (MOH) is strengthening efforts in three areas: Empowering seniors to stay healthy and active, enabling communities of care, and evolving new models of ageing in place.

Singapore has made good progress on initiatives under the \$3 billion Action Plan for Successful Ageing that was launched in 2015, she told the House yesterday.

There is a need to plan ahead for successive generations of seniors who have different needs and aspirations, Dr Khor said.

"The Merdeka Generation seniors, for example, are living longer and healthier, and are more educated, skilled and IT savvy, compared to our pioneers."

Dr Khor was responding to one of the two motions put forth by MPs, on ageing with purpose and on support for caregivers. A total of 25 MPs spoke on both motions, which were taken concurrently.

Besides empowering seniors, Dr Khor said the Government wants to provide them with opportunities for personal development and community participation.

She also spoke of expanding the reach of preventive health services to seniors in the community.

Dr Khor cited a nationwide screening programme by MOH and Temasek Foundation Cares that was launched last year, which helps seniors get screening for hearing, eyesight and oral health at a low cost, or for free. Project Silver Screen has benefited about 45,000 seniors since January last year, she said.

Since 2014, a group of about 3,000 volunteers have made more than a million home visits and engaged about 450,000 seniors aged 65 years and above, Dr Khor added.

During the home visits, these Silver Generation Ambassadors assess the seniors' health and encourage them to participate in preventive health and active ageing programmes in their neighbourhoods.

To get more seniors moving, MOH is also building larger daycare centres that offer a range of active ageing and care services, Dr Khor said. Five such Active Ageing Hubs have been opened so far, with another five more to open by 2020.

Dr Khor also called for suggestions to get more men to take part in active ageing programmes. Only one in five participants is male, according to anecdotal observations from community partners.

On enabling communities of care, Dr Khor said the Community Networks for Seniors initiative has been expanded to 89 neighbourhoods and areas. It involves government bodies, voluntary welfare organisations and volunteers teaming up to visit seniors.

This helps "close the last-mile delivery of active ageing programmes and care services, and provide timely and coordinated care for our seniors when needed", she noted.

Responding to Ms Cheng Li Hui (Tampines GRC) and Workers' Party's Mr Faisal Manap (Aljunied GRC), Dr Khor said that while the number of elderly suicides has increased in recent years in tandem with the ageing population, suicide death rates among Singaporeans aged 60 and above have declined from 22.4 per 100,000 residents in 2007 to 16.4 in 2017.

"Nonetheless, each suicide is one too many," she said, adding that the Government will boost efforts to proactively reach out to those at risk.

Care Line, a 24-hour senior helpline, will be expanded nationwide, she said, noting that the helpline staff call seniors regularly to check whether they are well and provide urgent assistance to distressed seniors.

As for new models of ageing in place, Dr Khor said the Build-Own-Lease (BOL) framework and funding model for nursing homes will continue to be reviewed to ensure residents can access good and appropriate care at affordable fees.

Under the BOL framework, the Government pays for the capital costs of development and tenders out operating rights to both private operators and voluntary welfare organisations so they do not have to bear the upfront capital costs.

Moving forward, Dr Khor said MOH will explore new concepts of ageing in place.

One such programme is Care Close to Home (C2H), which is offered at 15 sites across Singapore, serving more than 3,500 clients.

Under the scheme, seniors in rental flats can be cared for while continuing to live in their own homes. People from nearby Senior Activity Centres provide help for daily activities such as bathing and housekeeping, while monitoring the seniors' medical conditions.

Dr Khor said MOH is working closely with the National Development Ministry to develop new assisted living options that include care services, and more details will be announced in the Budget debate.

Wrapping up her speech, she said: "Longevity is not a curse but a blessing and offers us possibilities to live more meaningful and productive lives. As future cohorts of seniors are more educated and skilled, there is no better time to take advantage of our longer life years than now."

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To get more seniors moving, the Health Ministry is building larger daycare centres that offer a range of active ageing and care services, said Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor. Five such Active Ageing Hubs have been opened so far, with another five more to open by 2020. ST FILE PHOTO



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No let-up in MOM push for age-friendly work practices

Significant resources invested to support older S'poreans and their employers: Low Yen Ling

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

At Smarte Carte, a company that provides trolley management and baggage services at Changi Airport, more than half of its 300 employees are seniors and the average age of the staff is 65.

There is also no compulsory retirement age and employees receive the same pay even after they turn 62.

To cater to its mature workers, the Singapore chapter of the United States-based firm has redesigned its work processes and uses mainly diagrams and videos to train the seniors in bite-sized sessions.

Supervisors also tailor their pre-shift briefings to reinforce processes and key messages that are important for the older workers' safety and security.

Smarte Carte was cited by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Man-

power Low Yen Ling in Parliament yesterday as an example of how companies have restructured jobs to better support the employment of older workers.

Ms Low was responding to a motion put forth by MPs on the topic of ageing with purpose. MPs who spoke on the matter, such as Mr Henry Kwek (Nee Soon GRC), Mr Zainal Sapari (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC) and Dr Teo Ho Pin (Bukit Panjang), called for more companies to redesign jobs and improve working conditions for older workers.

Ms Low said there will be "no let-up in the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) efforts to foster age-friendly

DIFFERENT CONCERNS

While older workers desire to work as long as they can and are able to, younger workers shared with us that they do worry about how that may affect their career progression.



SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR MANPOWER LOW YEN LING

and progressive work practices among employers".

She said the Government has invested significant resources to provide funding and support for older Singaporeans and their employers. Through the Special Employment Credit scheme, for example, employers hiring older workers receive wage offsets of up to 11 per cent of their monthly wages.

The WorkPro Age Management Grant and Job Redesign Grant help employers implement age-friendly practices and restructure jobs for mature employees, Ms Low added.

She said MOM is reviewing the Special Employment Credit and WorkPro schemes and will provide more details when ready.

Ms Low also gave an update on the work of the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers, which was formed last year.

In the last eight months, the workgroup had gathered feedback and input from more than 500 people, including union leaders, human resource professionals, trade and industry associations, and small and medium-sized enterprises, she said.

"The exercise revealed diverse

wishes that need to be balanced against the needs and expectations of different stakeholders.

"For instance, while older workers desire to work as long as they can and are able to, younger workers shared with us that they do worry about how that may affect their career progression."

Ms Low said the tripartite work group's aim is to get a win-win outcome. "We need to strike a healthy balance between meeting the aspirations of our older workers and that of the younger workers, the need for organisational renewal, redesigning jobs and how wages and benefits can be flexibly adjusted."

Replying to Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar's (Ang Mo Kio GRC) call to raise Central Provident Fund contribution rates for those aged 55 and older, Ms Low said the work group was studying it. "For self-employed persons, we are going to make it easier for them to make Medisave contributions by implementing a 'contribute-as-you-earn' model."

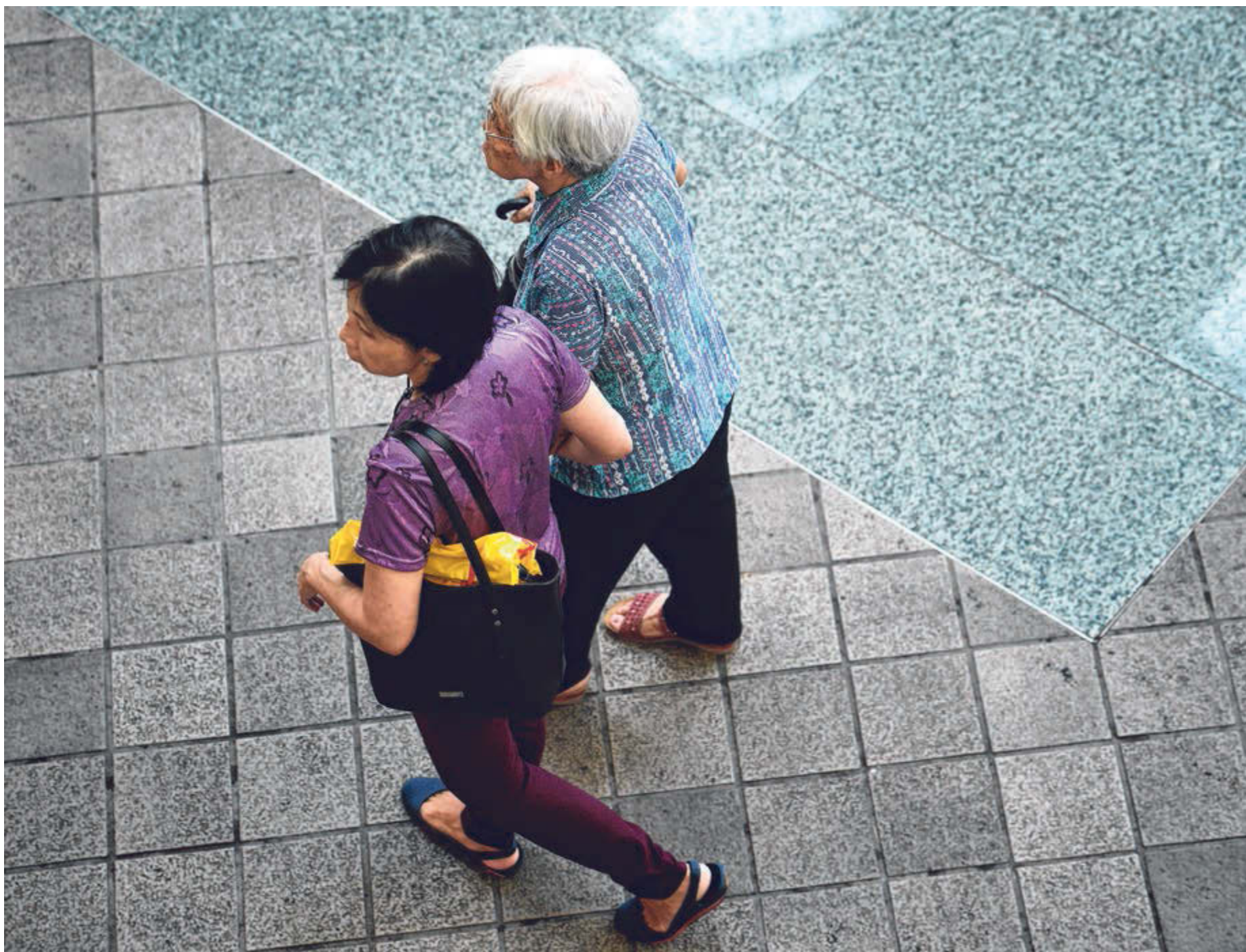
The Government would pilot this with its self-employed contractors.

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GREATER SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS, SENIORS

A Caregiver Support Action Plan will be rolled out to better help those looking after the elderly and infirm as the population ages and Singaporeans live longer. The Ministry of Health (MOH) held 19 focus group discussions involving over 200 people from last September to get a sense of these caregivers' needs and concerns. Yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong announced plans that MOH and partner agencies will embark on in five broad areas.

As Singapore's ageing population grows, so too will its number of caregivers. A new action plan focusing on providing more support for caregivers aims to help them better manage their responsibilities and stress levels.
ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



GETTING CARE

MORE COUNTERS FOR CAREGIVERS, SENIORS TO GET INFORMATION

The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) has eight counters at acute and community hospitals and its Maxwell Road office for people to find out about a range of services for caregivers and those they look after. It will set up four more counters at Silver Generation Office locations in Choa Chu Kang, Nee Soon, Pasir Ris and Toa Payoh by the second half of this year as a start.

ENHANCED DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR PEOPLE TO SEEK HELP

A beta version of a website will be launched by the end of the year to

give Singaporeans and their caregivers information, as well as services related to their end-of-life journey, including advance care planning and going about getting a Lasting Power of Attorney, which involves appointing a person or persons to make decisions on their behalf should they lose their mental capacity.

AIC will also develop a health marketplace e-platform by 2020 for caregivers to browse through feedback and ratings before buying goods or engaging services such as medical transport.

It will also revamp the Singapore Silver Pages at www.silverpages.sg



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

\$200 A MONTH GRANT TO DEFRAY COSTS

The Ministry of Health will introduce a new Home Caregiving Grant by end-2019 to defray the costs of caring for persons with permanent moderate disabilities, that is, those who need some help with at least three activities of daily living.

These are: washing, dressing, feeding, toileting, walking or moving around and transferring from a bed to chair or wheelchair.

This grant will complement severe disability schemes such as ElderShield and CareShield Life by providing support when care recipients are still able to perform these

activities with some assistance.

This grant will be meant-tested, and replaces the existing Foreign Domestic Worker Grant of \$120 a month, giving caregivers more flexibility to defray caregiving expenses.

EXPANDING MEDISAVE USE TO COVER SIBLINGS' HEALTHCARE EXPENSES

By end-2019, CPF members will be able to use their Medisave funds to cover the healthcare expenses of their siblings who are Singaporeans or PRs. Currently, they can do so for spouses, parents, children and grandparents.



EMPOWERING & TRAINING CAREGIVERS

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) has a network of 34 community outreach teams to identify persons with dementia or mental health conditions, refer them to services and assistance, and provide them with emotional support.

Some of these teams will begin to focus on caregivers who have or are at risk of developing depression, anxiety and burnout due to their roles. They will engage them on stress management, planning, and link them up with support groups and counselling where needed.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT NETWORKS

AIC will grow caregiver support networks across dementia-friendly

communities (DFCs) to provide platforms for caregivers and their loved ones to stay active, and leverage on the social capital among people with common experiences for socio-emotional support. There are two caregiver support networks in Queenstown and MacPherson DFCs, and these will be expanded to five by end-2019. AIC will also work closely with grassroots organisations to strengthen caregiver support.

ENHANCED ELDERCARE TRAINING

AIC will work with training providers to train foreign domestic workers early in their employment and to offer caregiver skills courses to better support those they assist by the second half of this year.



RESPITE FOR CAREGIVERS

NIGHT RESPITE SERVICE FOR CAREGIVERS OF SENIORS WITH DEMENTIA

The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) will pilot a new night respite service with selected nursing home providers for caregivers of seniors with dementia who experience behavioural and sleep issues at night.

This will let caregivers, especially those who work or care for the senior in the day, to get some rest. Seniors will be engaged through cognitive activities and tasks to help manage their behavioural and sleep issues. The pilot is expected to start in the second half of 2019.

HOME-BASED RESPITE OPTION FOR CAREGIVERS

OF END-OF-LIFE PATIENTS

This service will be piloted for cancer patients receiving palliative care at home from mid-2019, as end-of-life care can be physically and emotionally challenging.

Caregivers will get temporary relief with tasks such as showering, dressing and feeding patients.

PRE-ENROLMENT PILOT TO SHORTEN ACTIVATION TIME FOR RESPITE SERVICES

AIC will pilot a pre-enrolment system with a number of senior care centres and nursing homes to register them and their caregivers early so that administrative processes such as assessing eligibility for subsidies can be done beforehand.

WHY RESPITE SERVICE IS NEEDED

Some caregivers might require the respite at short notice due to their own exigencies. They cannot always anticipate when they might themselves fall ill or when they may have an urgent matter to deal with.



SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH EDWIN TONG



WORKPLACE SUPPORT

HELP WITH FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS, AND MORE

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is exploring increasing the budget for its Work-Life Grant, which was first introduced in 2013 to help companies offer flexible work arrangements to staff.

The grant was extended and enhanced in July last year so that companies can get some funding so long as one or more employees adopt flexible work arrangements.

Working caregivers have expressed the importance of such work arrangements to help them balance their work and caregiving commitments.

Currently, companies can tap the

grant and receive up to \$105,000 over a two-year period when employees adopt flexible work, such as flexi-load, flexi-place or flexi-time, arrangements.

MOM will share more details during the debate on its budget next month.

MOM and the Ministry of Health will also reach out to caregivers to raise awareness of the Adapt and Grow initiative, which provides employment facilitation and support for job seekers, such as job matching, training and wage subsidies. This will help caregivers return to work, especially if they have not been employed for some time.

WORKING TOGETHER

All caregivers are committed to providing the best care possible for their loved ones. They don't complain, and they are often determined and resilient in overcoming the challenges that come their way. Caregiving journeys may be long, but we can go the distance, if families and communities come together to support caregivers in our midst.



SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH EDWIN TONG

Commuters happier with public transport: Poll

Rise in satisfaction greater for MRT in survey; waiting time and comfort get lowest scores

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport Correspondent

Commuters were more satisfied with public transport last year, according to the latest annual Public Transport Customer Satisfaction Survey.

The poll commissioned by the Public Transport Council (PTC) showed the satisfaction score rising to 7.9 out of 10, up from 7.7 in 2017. It was the fourth consecutive improvement since 2014.

The improvement in satisfaction was larger for the MRT, with the score rising from 7.5 in 2017 to 7.9.

This matched the satisfaction level for buses, which was unchanged at 7.9.

Of the 5,000 people polled last October, 77.8 per cent felt bus services had improved in the past year, down from 80.8 per cent in the preceding one-year period, while 72.1 per cent felt MRT services had improved, up sharply from 50.3 per cent previously.

Even as overall satisfaction rose, waiting time and comfort had the lowest scores among eight attributes tallied. Waiting time for buses had a score of 7.4, up from 7 in 2017, while comfort for MRT scored 7.4, up from 7.1 in 2017.

"The uptick in commuter satisfaction is a reflection of overall improvements made in rail reliability," the PTC said yesterday. "Commuters' mean satisfaction score recorded for reliability rose by 0.9, from 6.7 in 2017 to 7.6 in 2018."

Commenting on the survey results on Facebook, Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan said that three years of intensive maintenance, expedited asset replacement and new trains and buses are beginning to show results.

"Commuters have noticed the improvements. MRT service took a hit during 2017 and the survey that year showed a dip in its score.

"In the 2018 survey, trains' score recovered, to be on a par with buses at 7.9," he said.

"These results are inspiring for our transport workers on the ground. They work day and night to

regain public trust. Their efforts are showing results.

"But they are not complacent. They are pressing on. They know that the commuters have high expectations. And they have to work even harder and smarter to meet the demand."

Observers said the hard work to steer public transport back to reliability should not be forgotten.

Singapore University of Social Sciences transport researcher Park Byung Joon said: "It is also important to look into other revenue sources for operators. But the first priority is good service."

Sengkang resident and author Jimmy Chua, 35, said: "I feel that there were fewer disruptions last



Of the 5,000 people surveyed last October in the poll commissioned by the Public Transport Council, 72.1 per cent felt MRT services had improved, up sharply from 50.3 per cent previously. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

year compared with the previous one.

"I can also see clear signage at the MRT stations for us to locate alternative bus services when the MRT service is down."

But he added that public transport capacity should be ramped up in bigger and fast-growing towns such as Sengkang and Punggol.

Marketing and communications head Eugene Mok, 33, said: "While there were visible improvements in terms of timeliness and reliability, operators should continue to enhance their road traffic tracking system to reduce bus bunching during peak hours, and also take pre-emptive measures to improve train service reliability, given that the train network is expanding."

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[SEE PARLIAMENT 84](#)

Average daily ridership

Number ('000)	2017	2018
MRT	3,122	3,302
LRT	190	199
Bus	3,952	4,037
Taxi	785	647
Total (excluding taxi)	7,264	7,538

Source: LTA STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Bus, train trips hit record high last year

Public transport ridership rose to hit another record high last year, with a total of 7.54 million people taking buses or trains a day, or 3.8 per cent more than in 2017.

It was the 14th consecutive annual increase in public transport ridership, according to figures released by the Land Transport Authority (LTA) yesterday.

LTA said average rail daily ridership – both MRT and LRT – chalked up the highest increase of 5.7 per cent to 3.5 million rides a day.

Bus ridership rose by 2.2 per cent to hit the four million mark for the first time. The growth in rail rides came on the back of a full-year operation of the Downtown Line 3, while a bigger bus fleet garnered more bus users.

In comparison, taxi rides continued to slide with competition from private-hire operators. LTA said cab rides fell 17.6 per cent to 647,000 trips a day. This is almost half the number before private-hire operators entered Singapore in 2013. In 2017, taxi rides fell 18 per cent from 2016 levels.

Christopher Tan



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Thai election agency seeks dissolution of party that nominated Princess

Constitutional Court to decide today on taking up case against Thaksin-allied party

PRINCESS APOLOGISES

I am sorry my genuine intention to work for the country and Thai people has caused such problems that shouldn't have happened in this era.

PRINCESS UBOLRATANA RAJAKANYA,
posting on Instagram.

ST MORE STORIES
Go to the Thai election microsite at str.sg/thai-election-2019

BANGKOK • Thailand's Election Commission said yesterday it is seeking the disqualification of a party that nominated a princess for prime minister, in what would be a setback for the opposition loyal to ousted former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thailand will hold a general election on March 24, its first since a military coup in 2014. The contest looks set to be a showdown between the military-backed, royalist Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha and Thaksin supporters.

Last week, a party allied with Thaksin said its candidate for prime minister, if it won the election, would be Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya, the Thai King's older sister.

The announcement caused a sensation in a country where the royal family has traditionally remained above politics.

Hours later, King Maha Vajiralongkorn made clear his opposition to his older sister's political foray, calling it "inappropriate" and unconstitutional.

Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy since 1932, but the royal family wields great influence and commands widespread devotion, with the king considered to be semi-divine.

The Election Commission disqualified the Princess on Monday and yesterday said it also aimed to dissolve the Thai Raksa Chart Party, which nominated her.

The party was one of several set up by Thaksin loyalists to add to the vote bank of his main Pheu Thai Party in an election where secondary parties are targeting seats via the party list system.

The commission said Thai Raksa



Thai Raksa Chart Party's legal adviser, Mr Surachai Chinchai, submitting a letter to the Election Commission in Bangkok yesterday. The party is asking the commission for a chance to give its account of recent events. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Chart had violated an electoral law with its nomination of the King's sister, which was "antagonistic towards the constitutional monarchy".

It added: "Therefore, it is agreed that a petition will be submitted to the Constitutional Court to consider dissolving Thai Raksa Chart Party."

Thai Raksa Chart officials told reporters the party did not violate the electoral law and it would ask the Constitutional Court to be "merciful".

The court said it would decide

today whether or not to accept the case. If found guilty, the party would be dissolved and its board members banned from standing for political office.

Thai Raksa Chart yesterday submitted a letter to the Election Commission, asking to give its version of the events surrounding the nomination.

Princess Ubolratana apologised on Tuesday for causing "problems" for the people.

"I am sorry my genuine intention to work for the country and Thai people has caused such problems

that shouldn't have happened in this era," she said on Instagram.

She relinquished her royal titles in 1972 when she married Mr Peter Jensen, an American and a fellow student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She lived in the United States for more than 26 years before they divorced in 1998.

The poll next month is shaping up to be the latest confrontation in nearly 15 years of political conflict between the mostly Bangkok-based, royalist-military elite and the largely rural-based, populist movement backed by Thaksin –

marked by street protests, violent clashes and military coups.

Parties affiliated with Thaksin, an ex-telecommunications tycoon, have won every election since 2001, but their governments have been battered by two coups and a barrage of court cases. Thaksin and his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, live abroad to avoid convictions they say are politically motivated.

To offset their electoral dominance, the ruling junta scripted a new Constitution, making the Upper House entirely appointed while limiting the number of constituency seats available at next month's poll.

If Thai Raksa Chart is banned, it will "reduce the opportunity of the Shinawatra party to have big numbers in Parliament", said Dr Titipol Phakdeewanich, a political scientist at Ubon Ratchathani University.

That would benefit the army-linked Palang Pracharath Party and increase the likelihood of Mr Prayut, its prime ministerial candidate, returning to power as a civilian leader.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court upheld eight-month jail sentences for six pro-establishment activists who led an occupation of the prime minister's offices in 2008, during months-long protests against a pro-Thaksin government.

The six leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy, including media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul and retired general and former Bangkok governor Chamlong Srimuang, had appealed against the two-year prison terms issued by a lower court in 2015. REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Pro-Thaksin parties turn to economy to woo voters

BANGKOK • Allies of Thailand's exiled former leader Thaksin Shinawatra are seeking to woo voters with a plan to revive economic growth after a failed bid to run King Maha Vajiralongkorn's sister as a prime minister candidate in next month's election.

Mr Kittiratt Na Ranong, a former finance minister and deputy leader of Pheu Thai – one of several parties backed by Thaksin along with Thai Raksa Chart Party – said his colleagues are "going forward in full

gear" ahead of the March 24 vote.

He distanced the group from Thai Raksa Chart, which is under fire after the King opposed its move to have Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya stand as leader.

"No matter what happens to other parties, our goal is to win this election for a chance to form the government that can solve these problems," Mr Kittiratt said in an interview on Monday, citing a growing wealth disparity, falling crop prices and fiscal mismanagement.

"People across Thailand have been feeling the effect of a bad economy," he added. "We need a total economic overhaul to take the economy out of the critical stage it's in."

Thaksin's camp is seeking to rally poorer voters who have helped his allies win every election in Thailand since 2001, drawn by policies such as cheap healthcare and crop price support.

Still, they face an uphill battle to take power after the junta that ousted Thaksin's sister, Yingluck

Posters of political parties lining a Bangkok street ahead of next month's election in Thailand.
PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Thaksin's camp is seeking to rally poorer voters who have helped his allies win every election in Thailand since 2001, drawn by policies such as cheap healthcare and crop price support.

Shinawatra, in 2014 changed the Constitution to include a military-appointed Senate that also gets a vote in picking the prime minister.

Thaksin's alliance with the Princess appeared aimed at putting up a leader who could take votes in the Senate away from junta chief Prayut Chan-ocha, the coup leader and prime ministerial candidate of Palang Pracharath, who is seeking to stay on as PM after the election.

But the move seemed to backfire: The King rejected her candidacy and Thaksin's opponents became energised.

"This reflects the very same political divide that has been in Thailand over the past decade," said Dr Titipol Phakdeewanich, political science professor at Ubon Ratchathani University in north-eastern Thailand. "It's the anti-Thaksin versus pro-Thaksin – the reactions that we see from the people this week show that the divide is alive and well."

Mr Prayut's administration has prioritised economic stability and sought to attract investment from overseas, most notably with a 1.7 trillion baht (\$573.6 billion) development plan for the eastern seaboard.

It also set goals of expanding infrastructure investment and upgrading workforce skills, and moved up the World Bank's Doing Business rankings by cutting red tape.

Yet while economic expansion has climbed since the coup, growth still trails neighbours in South-east Asia. Foreign direct investment as a proportion of the economy is lower than before the military takeover. BLOOMBERG

‘New, clean’ Golkar gives Jokowi full polls support

Party still a strong force in Indonesia despite ex-leaders’ scandals: Chairman

Francis Chan
Indonesia Bureau Chief
In Jakarta

Golkar, the party that once controlled Indonesia for three decades until the fall of strongman Suharto, remains a formidable political force today despite graft scandals embroiling two former leaders, chairman Airlangga Hartarto said yesterday.

He added that under his stewardship, the “new and clean” Golkar can continue to provide the political stability Indonesia needs to move forward, even as the party seeks to better engage youth voters through social media ahead of the presidential and legislative elections on April 17.

“What happened was a ‘carry-over’ problem,” he said, referring to the corruption charges against his predecessor, Setya Novanto, and former Golkar secretary-general Idrus Marham, which dogged the party in recent years.

The two separate cases, however, have not hit Golkar as hard outside Jakarta in terms of voter support, according to Mr Airlangga, who took over from Setya in December 2017.

“I think it is because we have, in the past one year, informed people that this Golkar is a new, clean Golkar, with different governance,” he said.

Mr Airlangga, who is Indonesia’s Industry Minister, was speaking at a rare public dialogue with members of the Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club yesterday.

He continues to believe that Golkar, with its long history in producing and developing capable leaders, is key to ensuring political stability in Indonesia and cited the party’s role in the ruling governments from 2004, after direct elections were first held in Indonesia.

“In the beginning of the Jokowi presidency, Golkar... was not in government, so for two years it was not easy to implement its programmes,” said Mr Airlangga, referring to President Joko Widodo’s popular moniker.

“But when Golkar supported the President in the last three years... it has been more smooth sailing for the government, that’s why most of its programmes were achieved.”

Notwithstanding the corruption scandals, Golkar can still command the goodwill of voters, particularly older Indonesians, many of whom still reminisce about the relative stability and prosperity of the early Suharto years, and when the country was effectively a one-party state from 1971 to 1999.

Golkar’s success at recovering from the graft scandals will be critical to Mr Joko’s bid for re-election as he once again faces former army general Prabowo Subianto, whom he defeated in 2014.

This time the President will have Golkar behind him after the party joined the ruling coalition in 2016 – a game-changing move for Mr Joko that allowed him to take control of Parliament and push through his policy reforms.

Golkar, which currently has the second-largest presence in Parliament after the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, is part of a massive coalition that nominated Mr Joko for the presidential race.

Mr Airlangga has promised that Golkar will pull out all the stops, especially in its regional strongholds such as West Java, which has the largest electorate, to ensure that the President wins big.

“Five years ago, Golkar was with Prabowo, and that’s why Prabowo won in West Java,” he said. “But we have switched camp, and that is why we are confident that now Jokowi will win in West Java.”

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Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (centre) and former minister Djoko Suyanto with Mrs Ani Yudhoyono at the hospital in Singapore. PHOTO: ANDI ARIEF/TWITTER

Former Indonesian first lady diagnosed with blood cancer

JAKARTA • Former Indonesian first lady Ani Yudhoyono has been hospitalised in Singapore since Feb 2 for blood cancer treatment.

Her husband, former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, said yesterday that she was currently under intensive medical care at Singapore’s National University Hospital.

“I ask for prayers from everyone that God will cure my beloved wife so that she can continue her activities back home,” Dr Yudhoyono, who is also chairman of Indonesia’s Democratic Party, said during a press conference in Singapore.

Democratic Party spokesman Imelda Sari said on Tuesday that the family and presidential medical

team had met the doctors treating Mrs Yudhoyono in Singapore, adding that Mrs Yudhoyono was in a stable condition.

President Joko Widodo had deployed the medical team to work with the Singapore doctors, Democratic Party executive Andi Arief said on his Twitter account.

Mrs Yudhoyono received well-wishes from state leaders, including Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Mr Joko and First Lady Iriana, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and National Police chief Tito Karnavian.

Dr Yudhoyono served as Indonesia’s president from 2004 to 2014. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



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US should engage in 'smart competition' with China

Recalibrate foreign policy course or risk collapse in ties, urges group of experts

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent
In Washington

The United States risks a breakdown in its relationship with China if it does not pursue negotiated solutions as it pushes back on Chinese actions that contravene international norms, warned a group of China specialists and former top officials in a report on Tuesday.

"The Trump administration is justified in pushing back harder against China's actions, but push-back alone isn't a strategy. It must be accompanied by the articulation of specific goals and how they can be achieved," said the 17 experts comprising the Asia Society's Task Force on US-China Policy.

Their report said the two countries were on a collision course, arising from a negative dynamic of American opinion-makers viewing China as a rising power seeking to unfairly undercut the US' economic prosperity and threaten its security, while their Chinese counterparts see the US as a declining power seeking to prolong its dominance by unfairly containing its rise.

To keep the relationship from running further off the tracks, the Trump administration should recalibrate its foreign policy course and engage in "smart competition" with China, said the 51-page report, which examined the areas of economics and trade, security, global governance, human rights and overseas influence.

It recommended that America build on its strengths to compete effectively with China while maintaining as much cooperation as possible in areas of common interest and also building international coalitions to press China to follow international laws and norms.

"While the US must never compromise its national interests, neither should it define those interests as always antithetical to China's pursuit of its legitimate economic and security goals... Opposing Chinese influence across the board is neither desirable nor feasible," it said.

"The Trump administration has correctly identified the need for a more forceful response. However, its approach is defective in several respects."

The expert group was chaired by the Asia Society's Centre on US-China Relations director Orville Schell and University of California San Diego Professor Susan Shirk, who was the deputy assistant secretary of state from 1997 to 2000. It included senior officials from the White House,

State Department and Office of the US Trade Representative during the Obama, Bush and Clinton administrations.

But Prof Shirk also warned about the dangers of overreacting to perceived Chinese threats, cautioning that some responses in the name of national security already risked threatening American innovativeness and casting a cloud of suspicion over ethnic Chinese in America, similar to the anti-communist red scare of the 1940s and 1950s.

"We should think long and hard about the cost of restrictions on Chinese investments, students coming here, export controls, that could be very self-defeating from the standpoint of America's own innovation ecosystem," she said at the launch of the report in Washington DC.

"The American body politic has a tendency to overreact to external threats, especially something that looks like subversion. I feel that the risk, at this present moment under the Trump administration, is actually a greater risk to the US than what the Chinese are trying to do," she added, citing ideas that had been floated, including cutting student visas and restricting Chinese students' access to American laboratories and campuses.

"There is a political tsunami in Washington against the China threat," she said. "This is a point of bipartisan agreement when there are so few others and the counter-espionage effort really picked up tremendous steam... but there's a tremendous risk that going around trying to get everybody really scared about this will create this great suspicion of all people from China and all ethnic Chinese."

The report also recommended that the US carefully implement newly revised laws that allow it to more closely scrutinise inbound investment from China and more widely curb exports of critical technologies to China and other countries.

It warned that decoupling the deeply intertwined US and Chinese economies would hurt America's interests, hindering its economy and innovation ecosystem while weakening US alliances if friendly countries believed they must choose between the two nations.

Prof Shirk said: "If we try to decouple our economies, we would put tremendous pressure on our friends and allies who are trading partners with China and the US... We shouldn't always assume they will always choose the US."

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US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin (left) and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer flanking President Donald Trump. The two Trump officials are scheduled to meet President Xi Jinping in Beijing tomorrow. Mr Trump has indicated a willingness to give the Chinese more time to firm up a deal. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Trump open to extending March 1 China tariff deadline to strike 'real deal'

SOME FLEXIBILITY

If we're close to a deal where we think we can make a real deal and it's going to get done, I could see myself letting that slide for a little while.

“

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP, referring to the March 1 deadline to raise tariffs on Chinese products.

WASHINGTON • US President Donald Trump has said he is open to extending a March 1 deadline to raise tariffs on Chinese products if the two sides are near an agreement, sending a conciliatory signal amid talks to resolve the trade war between the two biggest economies.

"If we're close to a deal where we think we can make a real deal and it's going to get done, I could see myself letting that slide for a little while," Mr Trump told reporters during a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

"But generally speaking I'm not inclined" to delay raising tariffs, he added.

Negotiators from the two countries began their latest round of talks this week ahead of the March 1 deadline for additional US tariffs on Chinese goods. Mr Trump has threatened to more than double the rate of duties on US\$200 billion (\$271 billion) in Chinese imports.

Mr Trump's comments are the strongest indication that he is willing to give the Chinese more time to firm up a deal to head off the bruising trade conflict, which has cast a cloud over the global economy. Extending the deadline could pave the

way for a potential deal-clinching meeting with President Xi Jinping.

Mr Xi is scheduled to meet key members of the US delegation, including US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, in Beijing tomorrow, the South China Morning Post reported, citing unidentified sources. Mr Trump met the Chinese delegation in the last round of talks in Washington.

Mr Trump's remarks also underscore his desire to secure binding commitments from Beijing to deeper reforms to its state-driven economic model, rather than simply short-term promises to buy more American goods.

The push for a deal comes as he begins to lay out his case for re-election next year, arguing that his administration has helped to buoy US growth and employment through tax cuts and deregulation.

But the tariffs have begun to bite in districts key to Mr Trump's political fortunes, including in farm states that traditionally vote Republican.

Mid-level officials began discussions on Monday in preparation for two days of talks starting today in-

volving Mr Lighthizer, Mr Mnuchin and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He.

Leaving the delegation's Beijing hotel yesterday morning, Mr Mnuchin said he's hoping for "productive meetings".

Aides to Mr Trump say this week's talks are important as they need to demonstrate credible progress to both the President and financial markets. US officials are pressing China to stop allegedly stealing intellectual property from American companies and commit to deeper reforms to a state-driven economic model that they say hurts US competitors.

One of Mr Trump's most persistent economic promises has been to rewrite the US relationship with China. Yet as he approaches a potential deal, some of the very hawks who have cheered on the President's trade war already fear he may end up falling short.

The US President has not been clear about whether he will sit down to finalise a deal with Mr Xi.

This week a White House aide said the US President still wants to meet his Chinese counterpart soon in a bid to end the trade war.

BLOOMBERG

New executive order set to exclude Chinese tech firms from US telecoms

WASHINGTON • The Trump administration is poised to issue this week an executive order to secure American telecommunications networks, a move that is likely to result in barring Chinese tech firms such as Huawei, according to three US officials.

The order, which President Donald Trump is expected to sign by tomorrow, would give the commerce secretary broad powers to stop American companies from doing business with foreign suppliers.

In development for more than a year, it will lay out the administration's concern that foreign-owned or controlled suppliers of equipment and services could compromise the security of the United States' phone and Internet infrastructure.

The pending announcement comes as US officials continue to press their case with allies and foreign countries that companies such as Huawei, which has close

ties to the Chinese government, pose considerable risk to burgeoning high-speed telecoms networks – what is known as 5G.

Officials cautioned that last-minute snags could delay the new order, which has been anticipated since last summer. The White House and Commerce Department declined to comment. Huawei did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The order, whose existence in

draft form was first reported by The Washington Post in June, will not ban specific companies or countries, officials said. But the regulations that result from the order, depending on how they are written, may have an outside impact on China and Chinese-made technology, which US officials have come to view with increasing alarm.

"This is crossing the Rubicon – asserting government power to block commercial transactions," said Mr Cleve Johnson, a former senior cyber-security adviser at the Commerce Department and now a partner at Wilkinson Barker Knauer.

"Just the authority itself could have enormous long-term implications in the US and global markets, and in US-China relations."

THE WASHINGTON POST

Valentine's Day haters find love in Galentine's Day, when female friends are feted

WASHINGTON • For some people, facing the onslaught of Valentine's Day flowers, candy and marketing can be overwhelming if you are single. For Ms Riya Patel, it is a reason to celebrate love – platonic love – even by long distance.

Welcome to the American phenomenon of Galentine's Day, feted on Feb 13 – a "holiday" gaining in popularity with each passing year, and also gaining in terms of its message of female empowerment.

"I've organised this giant group FaceTime with all my closest girlfriends. All of us are going to get on the phone and celebrate each other," says Ms Patel, a 22-year-old research analyst.

"And then I'll just celebrate me. That's probably going to end up being some restorative yoga in my bedroom and then making something with bourbon in it."

Galentine's Day was born in 2010 during an episode of the American



The American phenomenon of Galentine's Day, when female friends celebrate platonic love on Feb 13, started in 2000 in a TV sitcom episode and has been gaining popularity. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

TV sitcom Parks And Recreation when the main character Leslie Knope (played by Amy Poehler) hosts a brunch on Feb 13 for her best gal pals.

It was conceived as a defiant response to Valentine's Day – a statement that the traditional romantic love is not the only kind worth honouring.

But Galentine's Day has grown from being a semi-joke to a semi-serious holiday – and it is generating big money.

Many businesses have started selling themed products – cards, wine glasses, candies, cookies. Big box stores have dedicated sections for the event.

Galentine's Day sales are predicted to bring in a 20 per cent total revenue increase over the next three years, according to an estimate by NPD Group retail analyst Marshal Cohen.

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Indian tourists on South Andaman Island. Coconuts are in high demand among tourists visiting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



FULCRUM OF REGION

With the increasing geopolitical rivalry between China and the US, Asean unity and centrality is now a strategic necessity. Asean should not, and will not, choose between China and the US. It is China and the US that must recognise that Asean assumes a strategic role as a fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific region.



DR SISWO PRAMONO, head of the policy analysis and development agency at the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This vision, which Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to in May last year, mandates business connectivity between the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sumatra.

"Five hundred thousand tourists a year in Andaman and Nicobar want to have coconuts. They are small islands and indeed coconuts are in high demand," Dr Siswo said of the trade deal, which now may be expanded to include popular tropical fruits.

He underlined that the costs for the produce would have been much higher if the tourist islands had sourced them from the Indian mainland.

Dr Siswo referred to other areas of possible cooperation, saying that it was possible to lure about 20 per cent of the Indian tourists at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Aceh.

"It could be a bundled package. With a short distance, these tourists could have an additional leg of their trip to see Leuser National Park in Aceh, with its picturesque mountains.

"They could go further south to check out Lake Toba (the world's largest volcanic lake) in North Sumatra," he said.

About 700,000 Indian tourists arrive in Indonesia annually, with Bali a hot favourite among them.

India and Indonesia are also studying the possibility of Aceh being the source of construction materials for a planned US\$2 billion (\$\$2.7 billion) tourist resort project in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dr Siswo said.

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Indo-Pacific push: Asean view seen in coconut deal

Indonesia's sale of fruits to Indian islands shows emphasis on common interest: Official

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

In December, Indonesia decided to send samples of coconuts, eggs and curry instant noodles by sea from Aceh to India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The following month, the order came for 60 tonnes of coconuts

from the tourist islands, which are only 75 nautical miles from the Indonesian province at the northern tip of Sumatra.

The cost was a fraction of what it would have been had the islands ordered the coconuts from Chennai, the nearest point from India.

The endeavour – equally benefiting both countries – concretely reflects how Asean sees the new regional Indo-Pacific initiative, Dr

Siswo Pramono, head of the policy analysis and development agency at the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in a recent interview with The Straits Times.

He said the emphasis is on common interest leading to practical co-operation and economic benefits for the people at the grassroots.

"This is the Indo-Pacific concept that we mean. It is directly felt by the people. It is not about who wants to contain whom," said Dr Siswo, who spearheaded the December venture, which involved traditional wooden boats used by Aceh's coastal residents, instead of

modern vessels.

Many observers view the Indo-Pacific initiative as a strategy by the United States to counter, as well as contain, China's growing clout in the region, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative, which offers infrastructure project investments in countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Asean is set to issue a common stance on the Indo-Pacific some time in the middle of this year, said Dr Siswo.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said last May that the Indo-Pacific initiative should

US-Asean Partnership Forum

Common values or shared interests? Experts weigh in

THE STRAITS TIMES
MEDIA PARTNER

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Two differing views emerged from discussions at an international relations forum yesterday on what kind of concept the new regional Indo-Pacific initiative should adopt: Should it stress common values, such as democracy and human rights, or should it go bold on shared interests like economic benefits?

Experts and academics promoting the adoption of values said it would help to address dysfunctional democracy and the many severe human rights violations taking place in Asia today, while the opposing camp argued that the idea of promoting democracy could appear to sideline China.

China's geopolitical strategy implemented through its Belt and Road Initiative, which offers infrastructure project investments in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan, has gained greater influence in the region recently by focusing on shared interests such as mutual economic benefits.

Meanwhile, the United States, said observers, seeks to maintain its influence in the region in the face of China's growing clout.

Ms Olivia Enos, policy analyst at the Asian Studies Centre at the Washington-based Heritage Foundation, said emphasis on common values would allow the US to help address the genocide against the Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar. Human rights abuses also took place in China's Xinjiang region and in North Korea, while democracy in

Cambodia deteriorated, she added.

A United Nations report in August last year has said that nearly one million Muslim Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking minorities were being held in detention camps in Xinjiang. After denying this initially, the Chinese government later said the facilities were vocational education centres.

More than 70 experts, foreign policy specialists and young leaders from South-east Asia and the US were in Jakarta to attend the three-day US-Asean Partnership Forum, which ended yesterday.

The event was organised by the Pacific Forum, a Honolulu-based foreign policy research institute, in partnership with Habibie Centre, a Jakarta-based think-tank, and supported by the US Mission to Asean.

The panel discussion on democracy in the region was chaired by Mr Ravi Velloor, associate editor of The Straits Times, the forum's media partner.

Ms Enos argued that promoting shared interests does not run counter to promoting common values, saying both can be done in tandem.

"Even though there may be different ways that folks all across the globe express their values and interests, there are some values that are universal, for example, respecting their right to life," she told ST on the sidelines of the forum.

Dr Kittu Prasirtsuk, vice-rector for international affairs at Thammasat University in Thailand who did not quite agree with Ms Enos' view, shared his observation that when the US, Australia and Japan spoke about values, they seemed to have China in mind and to be trying to form a coalition against China.

Speaking on the sidelines of the panel discussion, Mr Velloor said: "Asean will be uncomfortable with



Mr Ravi Velloor, associate editor of The Straits Times, chairing the panel discussion on democracy in the region, at the three-day US-Asean Partnership Forum in Jakarta, which ended yesterday.

ST PHOTO: IKHWAN YANUAR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

any arrangement that smells of a gang fight against China. This is why it would like to see Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) evolve as a principles-based arrangement, if at all."

He added: "It would also greatly help if the US signals unequivocally that it too is not a revisionist power. The World Trade Organisation (WTO), the rules setter and rules enforcer for global trade, is heading for a crisis because of the US."

But he also noted that "the US, for the most part, continues to be admired as a nation that is ruled by laws, rather than men".

Thammasat University's Dr Kittu argued that the FOIP concept should not be used, or overemphasised, in terms of containing China, or balancing China, as it should be inclusive.

"The US should focus more on common interests, rather than values, because values can be very diversified, very hard and complex," he told ST.

"Talking about democracy can be sensitive. Many nations in South-east Asia like Vietnam, Laos, are on a one-political-party system, the communist system. No need to emphasise too much. China is also on a one-party system," he said.

Still, Ms Enos does not see it being in the US interest to not have any country investing in or being involved with China at all.

"The reality is that no country in South-east Asia is going to choose between the investment from the US and China. All countries are going to engage with (both) countries."

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Young leaders see challenges in US-Asean ties

Linda Yulisman
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Young leaders convening during the US-Asean Partnership Forum say there are growing challenges with the United States' reduced involvement in South-east Asia, which has opened the way for China to exert greater power over the 10-member regional grouping.

Among the challenges raised were weak US support for infrastructure development in the region and limited investment fund alternatives after the US withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), four of the 25 representatives of the Pacific Forum Young Leaders Programme said at a discussion yesterday.

They, however, remained optimistic that opportunities lay within these challenges, and hoped that while Asean was keeping its independence and centrality, it could look to the US as a "capacity builder" in a wide range of areas from infrastructure, to cyber security and the environment.

Ms Nur'Asyura Salleh, Asia project manager for US-based non-governmental organisation One Earth Future, pointed out there was a significant gap between the US' and China's support for infrastructure development across the globe, which also affected the region.

The US, under its Better Utilisation of Investments Leading to Development Act, had a budget of US\$60 billion (\$\$81 billion), which would be distributed under a partnership with US companies.

In contrast, China had invested around US\$1 trillion on its Belt and Road Initiative across the world.

Asean, meanwhile, needed around US\$110 billion in infrastructure spending a year until 2025, according to the Asian Development Bank.

"Currently, it is projected that only half of the budget funding will be met over the next 10 years in countries like Vietnam," Ms Nur'Asyura said, of the big financing need in the region.

Mr Andrew Rowan, director of GKTA Group, a business advisory firm, said Asean needed to set up an infrastructure institute that would focus on financing, among others, to maintain its independence, while also allowing cross-border collaboration and expertise sharing.

Ms Zing Yang, a senior vice-president of VNX Exchange, a marketplace and trading platform for tokenised venture capital assets, said another challenge is attributable to the US retreat from the TPP, which has enabled China to advance its own agenda for Asean.

"With the decline in the US engagement in the region and the focus on domestic policies, Asean states, particularly smaller ones in need of investment, are left vulnerable to debt-trap diplomacy and potential economic coercion by China," she said.

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N. Korea unlikely to give up all nuclear weapons, say US commanders

Pyongyang likely to seek partial denuclearisation as tensions ease

WASHINGTON • Weeks before a second summit between United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the top US military commanders for Asia and South Korea on Tuesday echoed an intelligence assessment that North Korea is unlikely to give up all its nuclear weapons.

Although he expressed optimism about the Hanoi summit on Feb 27 and 28, in verbal testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Philip Davidson, head of the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USindopacom), expressed doubts about North Korean intentions in his written submission to the panel.

“USindopacom’s assessment on North Korean denuclearisation is consistent with the intelligence community position. That is, we think it is unlikely that North Korea will give up all of its nuclear weapons or production capabilities, but seeks to negotiate partial denuclearisation in exchange for US and international concessions,” he said.

The commander of US forces in South Korea cited a “palpable”

decline in US-North Korean tensions, but likewise warned there is little evidence that Mr Kim is willing to give up his nuclear arsenal.

“Today is Day 440 since the last strategic provocation” by North Korea through a missile or nuclear test, Army General Robert Abrams told the Senate hearing. That has meant “a marked reduction in tensions” on the Korean peninsula, he said, and a reduced risk of miscalculation.

The White House declined to comment on Adm Davidson’s remarks.

While Gen Abrams credited the Trump-Kim talks as contributing to the improved atmosphere, he offered little optimism that Mr Trump’s efforts will lead to his goal of a nuclear-free North Korea.

Last month, US director of national intelligence Dan Coats told Congress he believed that it was unlikely that North Korea would give up all its nuclear weapons and that it had continued activity inconsistent with pledges to denuclearise.

Mr Trump has been eager for a second summit with Mr Kim even though their first meeting in Singapore in June last year produced only vague commitments from Mr Kim and little concrete progress since.

While the US President has cited

“Today is Day 440 since the last strategic provocation” by North Korea through a missile or nuclear test, Army General Robert Abrams told the Senate hearing. That has meant “a marked reduction in tensions” on the Korean peninsula, he said, and a reduced risk of miscalculation.

North Korea halting its nuclear testing and no new missile launches in 15 months as proof of progress, a report by United Nations sanctions monitors has also cast doubt on Pyongyang’s intentions.

Pyongyang “is using civilian facilities, including airports, for ballistic missile assembly and testing with the goal of effectively preventing ‘decapitation’ strikes” on a smaller number of identified nuclear and missile assembly and manufacturing sites, the UN report said.

A Stanford University study released on Tuesday also said North Korea had continued to produce

bomb fuel while in talks with the US and may have produced enough in the past year to add as many as seven nuclear weapons to its arsenal.

However, it said North Korea’s freeze in nuclear and missile testing since 2017 means its weapons programme probably poses less of a threat than it did at the end of that year.

Mr Kim pledged in Singapore to work towards denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and in September expressed willingness to permanently dismantle facilities at his country’s main nuclear site of Yongbyon – in return for corresponding US moves.

A US State Department spokesman said it remained confident that the commitments made at the Singapore summit would be fulfilled and added: “It is Chairman Kim’s commitment to denuclearisation upon which the world is focused.”

In talks with the US, North Korea has been seeking a lifting of punishing US-led sanctions, a formal end to the Korean War of 1950 to 1953 and security guarantees.

US Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun held three days of talks in Pyongyang last week to prepare for the second summit, which he said would include discussions of such corresponding steps.

Meanwhile, Vietnam’s Foreign Minister arrived in North Korea on Tuesday, Pyongyang’s state media said, ahead of the second summit.

With the high-stakes meeting now two weeks away, Pyongyang has yet to provide any official confirmation of the meeting in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi.

“A delegation of the Vietnamese foreign ministry led by Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, arrived here on Tuesday,” the official KCNA news agency said, without expanding. REUTERS, BLOOMBERG, AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) and his wife, Ms Ri Sol Ju, watching a performance in Pyongyang last week. He is due to meet US President Donald Trump for a second summit, in Hanoi, in a fortnight. PHOTO: REUTERS

Philippine border officers detain Chinese student

MANILA • Philippine immigration bureau officers have detained a Chinese art student who threw a cup of soya pudding at a police officer in a case that sparked outrage in the country. Zhang Jiale was detained after her release from police custody on Tuesday evening.

The bureau’s spokesman, Ms Dana Krizia Sandoval, said Zhang was detained for violating immigration laws.

“Zhang has already been charged as an undesirable alien for posing a risk to public interest,” said Ms Sandoval. “The incident showed her disrespect towards persons of authority, which in turn shows her disrespect to the country.”

She added that Zhang may face deportation and eventually be blacklisted from the Philippines.

In the incident last Saturday, police officer William Cristobal stopped Zhang from going into a Metro Rail Transit station in Manila as she was holding a cup of soya pudding. He told Zhang that she would have to finish it before she could enter the station.

The government has banned certain liquid and gel items on the MRT because of reports that militants are planning to bomb public transport systems in Manila.

Zhang argued with the officer and, in an outburst, hurled her cup of pudding at his chest.

A photo of the visibly upset Zhang and the policeman with his soiled shirt, as well as a video of the fracas, went viral on social media.

Across Facebook and Twitter, Zhang was derided for her arrogance and disrespect.

On Monday, Zhang expressed remorse over her behaviour.

“I (was) really in a bad mood and I was not able to control my emotion... I feel so regretful,” the 23-year-old freshman at the SoFA Design Institute told GMA News from jail.

She has been charged with “direct assault, disobedience... and unjust vexation”, and could be jailed for between four months and four years if found guilty.

But Ms Sandoval clarified that her court case and her immigration case are two separate matters.

“Her court case will run independent from her immigration case,” said Ms Sandoval.

Meanwhile, another Chinese national has landed in the news, this time for allegedly sexually harassing three teenage girls at a theme park in Pasay City.

Zhang Yang, a 19-year-old employee of an online casino operating in the country, was charged with acts of lasciviousness after the victims – who are 18-year-old students – accused him of fondling them inside a “horror house” attraction at the Star City amusement park last Thursday.

Zhang Yang was taken into custody after the students sought help from security guards. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

S’pore-based investor Jim Rogers to visit North Korea next month

SEOUL • A renowned investor and chairman of Rogers Holdings, Mr Jim Rogers, plans to visit North Korea next month at the invitation of its leader, Mr Kim Jong Un, according to sources on Tuesday.

The Singapore-based investor, who once said he would “put all of my money” in North Korea if he could, received the United States government’s approval for the trip with his wife.

The billionaire has touted North Korea, which has a gross domestic product per capita of US\$1,800 (S\$2,440), as an attractive investment destination for the past five years, even before the thawing of inter-Korea relations last year.

“Important opportunities are coming in the Korean peninsula, and North Korea is going to be the most exciting country in the world for the next decade or two,” Mr Rogers said on a South Korean TV show that aired on Jan 23.

Pyongyang’s invitation comes as the North Korean leader is due to meet US President Donald Trump for their second summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Feb 27 and 28.

Analysts in South Korea have raised speculation that the move indicates Pyongyang’s demand for Washington to lift economic sanctions in return for its efforts towards removing the country’s nuclear programme.

Following the North’s series of nuclear and missile tests in 2017, the Trump administration has led the drive at the United Nations to impose tough sanctions on the country.

Mr Rogers’ optimism towards the communist state stems from his investment experience in China.

“North Korea today is where China was in 1981. North Korea is a copy. He has been opening up the country just as (former Chinese leader) Deng Xiaoping did,” he said on the show, referring to Mr Kim.

Mr Rogers said the two Koreas would have “a great future” when South Korea’s capital, management and capabilities meet the natural resources and cheap, educated labour in the North.

In December, Mr Rogers was appointed as an outside director of Ananti, the only South Korean re-



International investor Jim Rogers is planning a trip to North Korea next month at the invitation of its leader, according to sources. PHOTO: JIM ROGERS

sort operator in the North.

Ananti has built and managed golf courses and condominiums across the Korean peninsula, including one located in the joint tourist complex at Kumgangsan in North Korea’s Kangwon province.

Other global companies are also paying keen attention to resource-rich North Korea, including interna-

tional producer and distributor of agricultural products Cargill, which conducted a business trip to North Korea in October last year.

The firm was said to be ready to sign a deal with the North as soon as sanctions are lifted, as the food shortage issue is one of North Korea’s top priorities. KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

THE NEXT CHINA

North Korea today is where China was in 1981. North Korea is a copy. He has been opening up the country just as (former Chinese leader) Deng Xiaoping did.



INVESTOR JIM ROGERS, referring to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un



Chinese art student Zhang Jiale was slammed on social media for throwing a cup of soya pudding at a police officer in Manila. PHOTO: BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION, PHILIPPINES

Duterte critic held for cyber libel

Philippine journalist says complaint against her over 2012 report baseless and baffling

Raul Dancel
Philippine Correspondent
In Manila

Philippine government agents arrested the top executive of a news website critical of President Rodrigo Duterte's policies yesterday on a cyber libel complaint that she has dismissed as "baseless" and "baffling". Officers sent by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) served Maria Ressa, chief executive of on-line news platform Rappler, with an arrest warrant issued by a local court on Tuesday at Rappler's headquarters, as her staff live-streamed a video of the incident on Facebook.

"We are not intimidated," Ressa

told reporters, as she arrived at the NBI's main office.

"No amount of legal cases, black propaganda and lies can silence Filipino journalists who continue to hold the line," she said. "These legal acrobatics show how far the government will go to silence journalists, including the pettiness of forcing me to spend the night in jail."

The warrant stemmed from a complaint of cyber libel filed in 2017 by businessman Wilfredo Keng.

A Rappler story in 2012, updated in 2014, cited intelligence linking him to illegal activities, such as human and drug trafficking.

Ressa had argued that the statute of limitations on libel, which should also apply to cyber libel, had al-

ready expired, so the NBI had no basis for investigating and charging her with the offence.

Notwithstanding, since the Rappler article was published before the country's cyber crime law took effect, "there was yet no crime of cyber libel to be committed", she said.

Separately, Ressa and Rappler were indicted in October for allegedly attempting to evade taxes by not reporting gains of almost US\$3 million (S\$4 million) in the company's 2015 tax returns.

The penalties could include a fine, along with up to 10 years of imprisonment for Ressa.

She claimed these cases piling up against her and her start-up were "politically motivated, and they are manufactured".

But Mr Duterte's spokesman, Mr Salvador Panelo, told reporters the current case against Ressa was not based on any violation of press free-



Philippine journalist Maria Ressa being surrounded by the media after her arrest in Manila yesterday on a cyber libel complaint. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

dom. "Simply, she committed a crime and the court finds probable cause. And that's why she is now being charged," he said.

Mr Duterte has bristled over Rappler's coverage of his government: scrutiny over his brutal crackdown

on the narcotics trade, the challenging of the accuracy of his public statements and criticisms of his foreign policies.

Mr Duterte banned one of Rappler's senior reporters from covering him, and lashed out at the media

company in several public speeches.

In January last year, the Securities and Exchange Commission revoked Rappler's licence - though it allowed the company to continue operating as the decision was not yet final - for violating foreign ownership rules, a charge it denies.

The Philippine President's antagonism towards the media is not directed at Rappler alone. He had also threatened to block the licence renewal for ABS-CBN, the country's largest broadcast network.

He has called reporters "spies", used expletives to describe them and made thinly-veiled death threats, warning reporters they are not exempt "from assassination".

Amnesty International called the cyber libel case "yet another absurd legal attack" that amounted to harassment.

Ressa was CNN's Jakarta bureau chief before setting out on her own and forming Rappler in 2012. She has won two prestigious journalism awards - a Press Freedom award from the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, and the International Centre for Journalists' Knight International Journalism Award.

Last year, Time magazine named her and three other journalists as its Persons of the Year.

rdancel@sph.com.sg

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UP \$130 **\$53**

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Sling Bag
UP \$79.90 **\$63.90**

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An anti-Brexit protester outside Britain's Houses of Parliament on Tuesday. British Prime Minister Theresa May continues to promise that she will negotiate a better deal for Brexit although none of the EU leaders is prepared to offer any concession. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



News analysis

PM May hedging her bets as Brexit deadline looms

UK leader seems to be playing a risky game to see who will blink first – British MPs or EU



Jonathan Eyal
Global Correspondent

Britain's Parliament convenes today for another debate on the terms of the country's withdrawal from the European Union. With nothing decided just six weeks before Britain is scheduled to leave the EU, today's parliamentary gathering was meant to be decisive. But the chances are that another opportunity will be missed, since Parliament has little to discuss. This is because Prime Minister

Theresa May continues to promise that she will negotiate a better deal for Brexit – as the process of Britain's separation from the EU is now universally known – despite the fact that none of her European fellow leaders is prepared to offer any concession. In a vote last month, British lawmakers overwhelmingly rejected the deal which Mrs May negotiated with the EU, largely because this included a controversial clause which gave Ireland a right of veto over the final trade arrangements between Britain and the EU, pending the satisfactory resolution of the status of the border with Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. The rejection of the deal is putting Britain on course for an abrupt Brexit with no transition period to minimise expected economic disruption because

current EU treaties specify a time limit during which separation negotiations must be completed, and this expires on March 29. Having initially argued that the Brexit agreement she negotiated was the best possible and could not be amended, Mrs May proceeded to do precisely that: She went to European leaders demanding that they amend or remove clauses the British Parliament finds offensive. But Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, the EU's executive body, is steadfastly refusing to reopen the original Brexit agreement. "President Juncker maintained the EU's position that they will not reopen the withdrawal agreement," Mrs May admitted in a report to her Parliament on Tuesday. Still, Mrs May appears determined to treat Brussels' refusal as merely a challenge rather than a definite word; she continues to reassure British MPs that a renegotiation is still on the cards. "The talks are at a crucial stage. We now all need to hold our nerve to

get the changes this house requires and deliver Brexit on time," she told Parliament in London. Most MPs suspect that she is merely playing for time, on the assumption that as the deadline approaches and the risk of Britain simply crashing out of the EU with no deal increases, either European governments would blink first and grant her the concessions she needs, or parliamentarians will swallow hard and accept the initial deal which they rejected. But that is a very risky game, for if the EU calls Britain's bluff, the country could find itself outside the EU with no leverage to negotiate future trade deals with Europe, something economists forecast would be a disaster. And apart from infuriating EU negotiators, the tactic renders Mrs May vulnerable to accusations that she is interested more in diplomatic games rather than a substantial compromise. Mr Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of Labour, the largest opposition party, claims the Prime Minister had shown she only wants to

"deliberately run down the clock and play chicken with people's livelihoods".

However, the British leader is determined to pursue her tactic of both refusing to budge, and refusing to outline a way out of the impasse. She has already pushed some of the important parliamentary Brexit votes scheduled for today to the end of the month.

And, when confronted by legislators with the fact that any new Brexit treaty requires at least two weeks between its signature and the process of its ratification in the British Parliament, Mrs May responded by promising to find procedural fixes to such difficulties, the surest indication that she is steeling herself for haggling with the EU until the very last minute.

Still, tomorrow's parliamentary debate remains important, for opposition MPs are likely to test the possibility of forcing Mrs May to ask for a postponement of the deadline for talks with the EU.

Another proposal under discussion could remove the option of simply leaving the EU with no deal, a roundabout way of forcing the British government to strike a compromise with Europe.

But at least for the moment, nobody seems to know what goes through Mrs May's mind on such matters and how she could be persuaded to adopt a different approach.

Even ministers in her Cabinet are now being reduced to asking journalists for the latest gossip about Mrs May's intentions.

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Ford plans to move car plants out of UK: Report

LONDON • Ford Motor told British Prime Minister Theresa May that it is stepping up preparations to move production out of Britain, The Times newspaper has reported.

The carmaker told the Prime Minister during a private call with business leaders that it is preparing alternative sites abroad, The Times said on Tuesday.

Ford was not immediately available for comment.

Ford, which operates two engine plants in Britain, last month said that it faces a bill of up to US\$1 billion (\$\$1.36 billion) if Britain leaves the European Union without a deal.

Carmakers and other manufacturers have warned about the toll a no-deal Brexit could impose, including higher tariffs, disruption to supply chains and threats to jobs. Britain is scheduled to leave the EU on March 29.

Another participant on the private call with Mrs May said that other companies delivered the same warning as Ford, The Times reported.

"This isn't about contingencies any more – we are taking steps because of the uncertainty. It's real," the participant said during the call.

Last week Nissan Motor said it scrapped plans to build its new X-Trail sport utility vehicle in Britain and will produce it solely in Japan, saying that uncertainty over Britain's departure from the EU was making it hard for it to plan for the future.

Ford is the top-selling automotive brand in Britain, which is its third-largest market and the destination for roughly one in three cars made at its plant in Cologne, Germany. It employs about 13,000 people in Britain. REUTERS

REAL UNCERTAINTY

This isn't about contingencies any more – we are taking steps because of the uncertainty. It's real.



AN UNNAMED PARTICIPANT ON THE PRIVATE CALL WITH MRS MAY.

EU unveils contingency plan to keep Channel Tunnel rail link open

BRUSSELS • The European Commission (EC) has announced plans to keep the rail link with Britain through the Channel Tunnel open

on current terms for three months after a no-deal Brexit, in an effort to minimise disruption expected from any abrupt split.

The United Kingdom is on track to leave the European Union on March 29 without a deal unless Prime Minister Theresa May can convince the bloc to amend the divorce deal she agreed last year and get it approved by British lawmakers.

The proposal by the EU's executive arm would extend safety authorisations for the Channel Tunnel rail link, provided the UK also maintains identical safety standards. "This will ensure the protection of rail passengers, the safety of citizens and will avoid major disruptions of cross-border rail operations and shuttle services after the UK's withdrawal," the EC said in a statement on Tuesday.

The EC said three months should be sufficient time for new permanent arrangements to be agreed on. Its proposal, which must be ap-

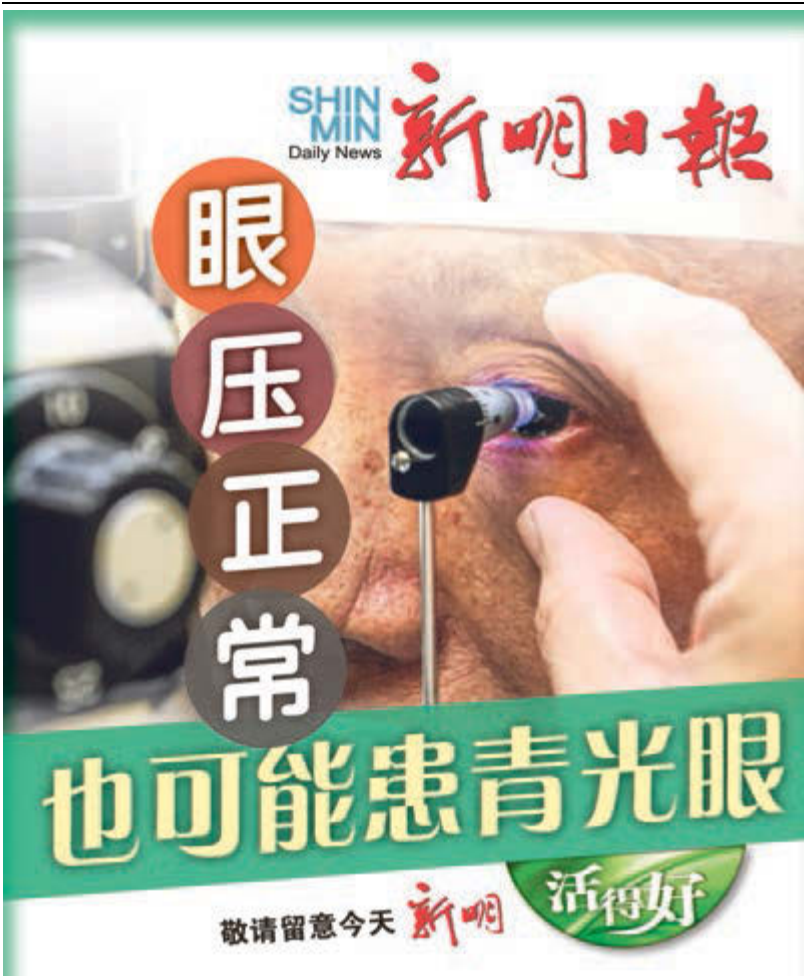
proved by EU members and the European Parliament, follows a slew of other contingency plans for issues such as social benefits and air traffic. Channel Tunnel operator Eurotunnel said last month it was taking steps to ensure that any no-deal Brexit would have a minimal impact on its transport network.

Mrs May's government has also said goods arriving from the EU – including via the Channel Tunnel – will be allowed into the UK without full Customs checks for at least three months after any no-deal Brexit.

Despite such moves, the EU says a no-deal Brexit would entail significant economic damage and its contingency plans are to ensure only basic connectivity, falling well short of regulating all separation issues or new post-Brexit ties. REUTERS



Channel Tunnel operator Eurotunnel said last month it was taking steps to ensure that there would be a minimal impact from any no-deal Brexit. PHOTO: REUTERS



More hotels offering guests a breath of fresh air

NEW YORK • An increasing number of hotels around the world are now providing guests the option to book rooms with filtration and purification systems that minimise threats of air pollution and offer cleaner air. "Interior air quality can be abysmal," said Ms Beth McGroarty, research director for The Global Wellness Institute, a non-profit organisation for the wellness industry. "Hotels are combating this by installing in some of their rooms high-tech systems that improve the air their guests are breathing."

According to data released last year by the World Health Organisation, nine in 10 people globally breathe polluted air. Many top urban destinations have been recognised for unhealthy smog conditions.

And travellers with respiratory conditions or allergies may especially benefit from breathing cleaner air. Most hotel properties charge a higher nightly rate for their clean-air rooms and a stay can be 5 to 7 per cent more expensive. Last month, the InterContinental

San Francisco installed air purifiers in 30 of its 556 rooms following last year's wildfires in Paradise, California, about a three-hour drive away.

"Even though the wildfires weren't near the city, they affected the air quality, and many of our guests asked us for masks and filters because they had breathing difficulties," said Mr Harry Hobbs, an area director of engineering for InterContinental Hotels.

"After this initial trial, I want to offer cleaner air in more rooms and more hotels." NYTIMES

Global order set to take centre stage at Munich conference

Security event comes amid backdrop of US ditching 1987 missile pact with Soviet Union

Markus Ziener
For The Straits Times
In Berlin

A multitude of politicians, military experts and media staff will be gathering this week in Munich to discuss global security issues.

But the estimated 600 participants will not have an answer to the key question: How to organise a world where major players are seemingly unwilling to commit themselves to binding agreements and loyalties.

In fact, the 55th Munich Security Conference, which opens tomorrow, will take place amid uncertainty not seen in decades.

"The global order disintegrates," said conference head Wolfgang Ischinger. The idea of a rules-based international framework seems almost impossible to be further upheld, he explained.

Mr Ischinger, Germany's former deputy foreign minister and former ambassador to the United States, was referring to the many agreements that have been terminated, ignored or questioned.

The most recent example is the US dropping out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty signed in 1987 with the former Soviet Union.

The treaty eliminated all land-based ballistic and cruise missiles, and launchers with ranges between 500km and 5,500km.

The US and others have been accusing Moscow of violating the treaty. Instead of fighting the breaches or at least renegotiating the treaty, the Trump administration terminated it unilaterally.

The move is particularly worrisome for Europe. Russia has been developing a new cruise missile named SSC-8 that can most likely travel farther than 500km.

The missile is also presumably able to fly below radar, making it difficult to detect, and leaves only minimum time for an advance warning.

Against this backdrop, the existing conventional nuclear weapons in Europe may not pose real deterrence any more to Russia.

If all the assumptions about SSC-8 are true, the missile could become a genuine game changer in the military power balance in Europe.

Without the INF treaty – no matter how flawed it is – Moscow is free to openly pursue its missile programme.

This raises the question: Would Washington respond in kind to possible Russian aggression towards Europe, risking an attack by Russian long-range missiles? Or will Nato, the Western military alliance, deploy nuclear-armed missiles in, say, nearby Poland?

Russia is still accusing the West of expanding Nato into the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence – such as the Baltic states,

It is undisputed that a Nato without clear American commitment will definitely lose its vigour. Europe so far has taken only baby steps in organising its own military, made up of 25 of the 28 European Union members.

Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania.

A deployment of nuclear weapons in one of these countries will very likely escalate the situation even more.

To make matters worse, US President Donald Trump only reluctantly, if at all, supports Nato.

He has chided countries such as Germany for not contributing enough funds to the Nato budget, and has skipped Nato meetings.

This has put into doubt the willingness of the US to defend Nato members if they are attacked, as Mr Trump did last year when he mused openly about a possible war between Montenegro and Russia, and wondered if it would be worthwhile to defend a small Nato member.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a speech last December at the German Marshall Fund, made clear what to expect from American foreign policy.

He said: "Our administration is thus lawfully exiting or renegotiating outdated or harmful treaties, trade agreements, and other international arrangements that do not serve our sovereign interests, or the interests of our allies."

In Europe's security circles, this was mostly seen as another variation of Mr Trump's slogan of "America first".

It is undisputed that a Nato without clear American commitment will definitely lose its vigour.

Europe so far has taken only baby steps in organising its own military, made up of 25 of the 28 European Union members.

Mr Ischinger acknowledged the continued European dependency on American military capabilities. "We have to change that," he said in a recent interview.

While the future of Nato will be front and centre in Munich, the political background for this debate is the US' turning away from the tightly knit global set of rules and agreements.

Besides dropping the INF treaty, Washington is also out of the Iran nuclear deal, has abandoned the Paris climate accord, terminated membership with the United Nations' culture and sciences body Unesco, left the UN human rights council, skipped the already brokered Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with Europe, and opted out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact.

Washington is also exerting pressure even on its closest allies if they do not immediately fall in line with the policy of the Trump administration – for example, European countries that stick to the Iran deal and Germany, which plans to continue building a gas pipeline with Russia and possibly use technology from Chinese equipment supplier Huawei in infrastructure projects.

Europe, already preoccupied with the back and forth of Britain's exit from the EU and the rise of populism, has been thrust into quite an uneasy spot.

The stability and predictability Europe has enjoyed in the three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is clearly fading.

In Munich, German Chancellor Angela Merkel will once again highlight the advantages of multilateralism and cooperation.

"The conviction that we win more together than if we work against each other is up for debate," Dr Merkel said last week.

"And I am very committed to ensuring that the multilateral structures be developed and preserved."

As good as this sounds, for many, Dr Merkel is merely praising virtues of the past.

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The colours of the French and Italian flags being projected on the Campidoglio in Rome in this Jan 30, 2016, photo. It marked the 60th anniversary an exclusive twinning agreement between Rome and Paris. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

France, Italy reaffirm ties after war of words

ROME • The "exceptional" historic and human connection between France and Italy has been reaffirmed after the countries' presidents spoke over the phone amid an escalating row between the European neighbours.

French President Emmanuel Macron "has spoken on the phone with Italian President Sergio Mattarella, following the recall for consultations of the French Ambassador to Italy", a statement from the Elysee published by the Italian

government on Tuesday read. The relationship between the two countries has been kept going "by an exceptional historic, economic, cultural and human connection", the statement continued.

The presidents also agreed that "France and Italy, which have built Europe together, have a special responsibility to operate together to defend and relaunch the European Union".

Last week, France recalled its ambassador from Rome after Italian

Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio met members of the Yellow Vest protest movement in Paris. Its weekly demonstrations have repeatedly degenerated into clashes with French security forces.

The recall was part of a months-long war of words between Italy's ruling coalition – comprising Mr Di Maio's Five Star Movement and Mr Matteo Salvini's far-right League – and France's head of state.

Recent months have also seen Mr Salvini repeatedly accuse Mr

Macron of hypocrisy for criticising Italy's hardline stance against migrant rescue ships while at the same time refusing to open French borders to irregular migration.

"The relationship between Italy and France is so solid from a historic, cultural and economic standpoint that they certainly cannot be called into question because (of) single episodes," Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said on Tuesday, according to Ansa news agency.DPA

Bavaria's barrel of fun



Bavaria's state premier Markus Soeder speaking to traditional Schaeffler dancers on Tuesday during a reception at the state chancellery in Munich, Germany. The barrel-makers' dance dates back to the 16th century when half of Munich suffered from the plague and is performed every seven years. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Too loud! Music lovers risk hearing loss: WHO

GENEVA • A generation of music lovers are damaging their hearing with audio players that do not limit dangerously high noise levels, the UN health agency has said.

Already 466 million people worldwide have debilitating hearing loss, up from 360 million in 2010. The figure is expected to nearly double to 900 million, or one in every 10 people, by 2050, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Tuesday.

"Over one billion young people are at risk of hearing loss simply by doing what they really enjoy doing a lot – which is listening regularly to music through their headphones over their devices," Dr Shelly Chadha of WHO's prevention of deafness and hearing loss programme told a news briefing.

WHO is urging manufacturers and regulators to ensure smartphones and audio players have software that can help limit people from listening to music too loud for too long. "What we propose are certain fea-

tures like automatic volume reduction and parental control of the volume so that when somebody goes over his sound limit, he has the option that the device will automatically reduce the volume to a level which is not going to harm his ears," Dr Chadha said.

"Our effort through this standard is really to empower the user to make the right listening choice or take the risk of developing hearing loss and tinnitus a few years down the line," he added.

The European Union is the only part of the world to mandate that output levels on personal audio devices be set to a standard of 85 decibels, with a maximum of 100.

WHO is also looking at volume levels in places such as nightclubs and sports arenas. "What we working on... is to develop that kind of regulatory framework about the different venues... which often have very high levels of sound being played and exposure for a long time." REUTERS

WorldBriefs

Mexican mobster found guilty by US court

NEW YORK • Mexican mobster Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman has been convicted of crimes spanning a quarter-century in a trial that laid bare his lavish lifestyle and penchant for extreme violence.

The 61-year-old former boss of the notorious Sinaloa cartel – famed for his brazen escapes from Mexican prisons – faces life in prison for smuggling tonnes of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana into the US. He was also found guilty on money laundering and weapons possession charges. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Belgium strike leads to flights cancellations

BRUSSELS • Belgian airports cancelled almost all flights yesterday due to a national

strike over pay and working conditions that halted activity at ports, hit public transport and led to blockades outside factories. Air traffic control body Skeyes shut Belgian airspace for 24 hours from 10pm on Tuesday because it could not guarantee enough staff would turn up. REUTERS

14 in China convicted of food safety breaches

BEIJING • Fourteen people, including officials of renowned traditional Chinese medicine company Beijing Tong Ren Tang, have been found guilty of reusing expired honey and changed production dates. A company subsidiary was fined 14 million yuan (\$2.8 million) for breaching food safety regulations after a sting revealed last December that a honey producer of Tong Ren Tang Bee Industry was reusing expired honey products. XINHUA

OPINION

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says
Battlefield losses not the end of ISIS

United States President Donald Trump stands poised to declare victory over the so-called Islamic State. US-backed forces have converged on the group's last holdout in the Syrian village of Baghuz. When these five sq km are retaken, the brutal insurgents who once ruled over eight million people in an area as large as Britain will no longer command any territory. Yet this is by no means a "mission accomplished" moment. It can only mark the beginning of a different, more shadowy and insidious war. ISIS will have to be engaged continuously and relentlessly.

Even with no territory, the ISIS flag will continue to fly in cyberspace. Its pernicious ideology remains potent and contagious. Millions across

the globe, in the developing and developed worlds alike, are receptive to its message. Its tribe of imitators and sympathisers continues to attempt attacks. The Pentagon's own assessment says the terrorist group is intent on reconstituting itself and could retake land in a matter of six to 12 months should the US military withdraw from Syria. Mr Trump's director of national intelligence Dan Coats testified before Congress last month that this loosely-knit organisation has returned to its guerrilla warfare roots and continues to plot attacks. General Joseph Votel, head of the US military's Central Command, has said that ISIS still has "leaders, fighters, facilitators, resources and the profane ideology that fuels their efforts".

A United Nations report on Monday warned that ISIS remains a global threat with as many as 18,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria. For South-east Asia, ISIS' loss of territory has raised the possibility of trained fighters returning to the region, and launching attacks. Just two weeks ago, the bombing of a cathedral in southern Philippines that killed 20 was claimed by this network. Indonesia and Malaysia, which have broken up several terrorist plots over the past year, continue to stay on the alert. In its Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2019, the Ministry of Home Affairs said last month that the threat to Singapore, especially from ISIS, remains high. Policymakers, therefore, cannot afford any laxity in their vigilance. Abu

Bakr al-Baghdadi, the ISIS leader, is at large. The military success, therefore, remains incomplete. Troops, warplanes, missiles and drones, in any case, can only be part of the solution. Even if Mr Trump maintains forces in both Syria and Iraq, the best the military can deliver is a veneer of calm. Lasting gains can only be secured through good governance and the cultivation of resilient societies that prize cohesion and provide meaningful opportunities for advancement to their citizens. Laws that ensure effective prosecution of suspects and policies that enable successful deradicalisation and rehabilitation are the other requisites. To believe that terrorism dies in the battlefield is to cherish a false hope.

HomeFront

Trophy for coming in 8th?

Recent changes to the National School Games will see more participants in sport being recognised. But does giving out broad-based awards blunt the competitive edge and the drive for excellence in sport?



Rafael Nadal, at 1.85m and 85kg, is afraid of the dark, dogs and thunderstorms. On losing, however, the 17-time Grand Slam champion has this to say: "Losing is not my enemy... Fear of losing is my enemy."

When his four-year unbeaten streak at the French Open ended in 2009 after a shock fourth-round defeat by world No. 25 Robin Soderling, Nadal said at the post-match press conference: "Sometimes you need a defeat to give value to your victories."

Perhaps, as the Spaniard uttered those words, one particular victory from the year before might have come to mind: his maiden Wimbledon title.

In his book *Rafa*, published in 2011 and co-written with John Carlin, Nadal describes how he "cried incessantly" for half an hour in the dressing room after his five-set loss in the 2007 Wimbledon final.

The Spaniard also admitted that the defeat had left him "utterly destroyed", and that it had continued to haunt him even as he contested another Wimbledon final a year later.

But the start of the fifth set during the 2008 final was when Nadal realised: "This was the moment in the match when that experience of defeat proved most valuable... (Back then) I hadn't been prepared to cope with the inevitable nerves and tension with the due measure of mental calm."

Armed with the memory of that defeat and its lessons, Nadal went on to win his first Wimbledon title in a nearly five-hour match.

Losses, no matter how painful, do not mean failure. There is value in defeat and there are lessons to be learnt from losing.

And the merit of these lessons must not be diminished with the

changes taking place at this year's National School Games (NSG) junior division for children aged nine to 11.

The changes are part of an ongoing review of the NSG competitions, which started in 2015 and was completed last year.

One change, announced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) last month, will see recognition awarded to the top eight positions in some sports, instead of the top four. This is to provide more opportunities for student-athletes to experience success.

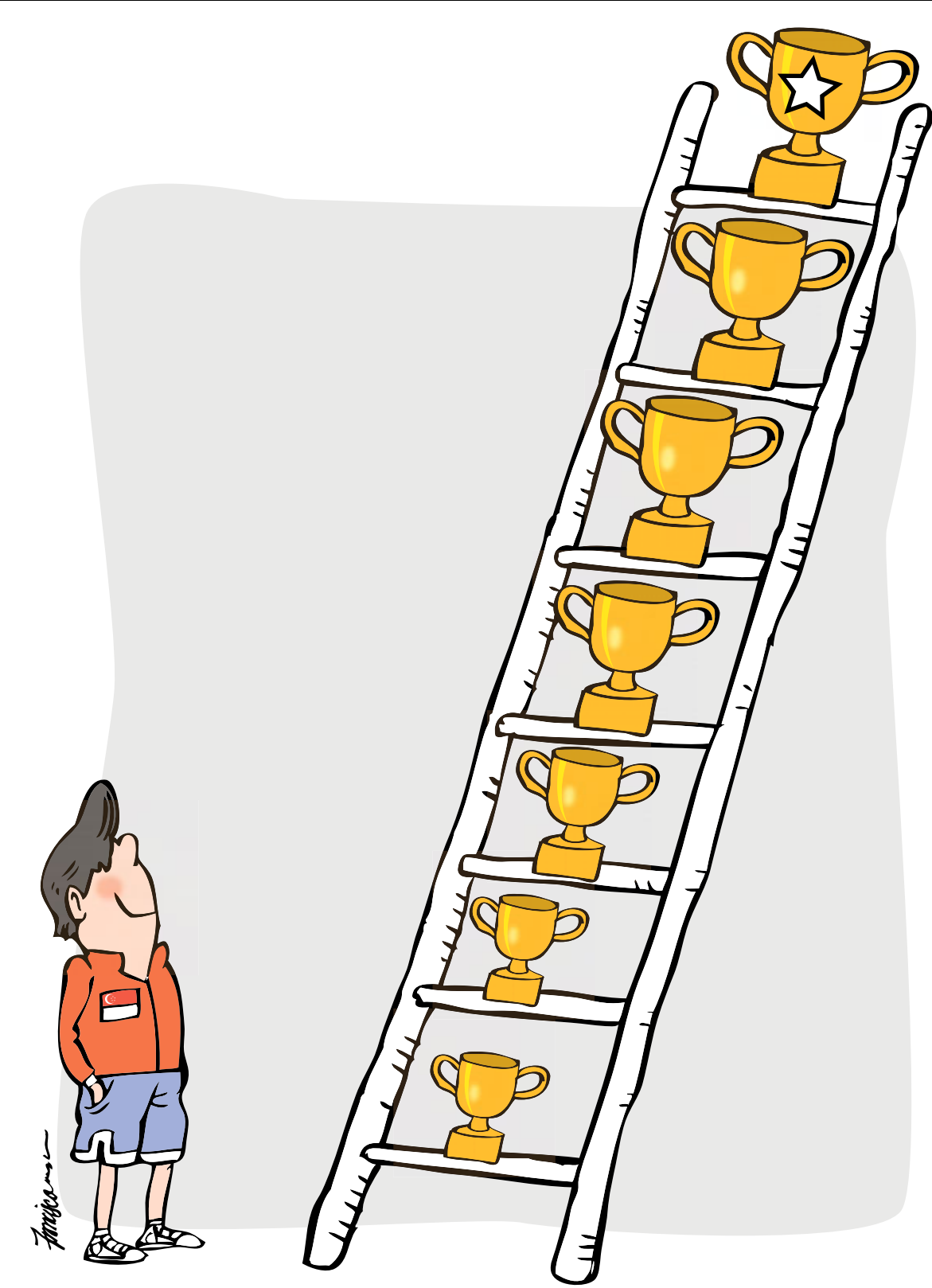
Criterion-based recognition will also be introduced for some sports, such as timings for track and field and the number of pinfalls in bowling. This is to "promote self-improvement, mastery and the importance of striving for goals based on objective targets", MOE said.

On the review of the NSG, Mrs Tan Chen Kee, MOE's divisional director of its student development curriculum division, said: "The review was started because, first, we wanted to look at our students' initial encounter with sports and how we can strengthen that - how we can make it a lot more enjoyable, less competitive and how we can adopt a long-term athlete-development view of things and... help the children slowly ease into the competition and the sports."

While making sport enjoyable is a worthwhile goal, some observers have questioned the wisdom of reducing the competitive element in school sports. Everyone can participate in sport, but if everyone is a winner, then no one learns from losing.

Admittedly, the stakes of the junior division competition are far lower than that of a Grand Slam tournament. But there is so much that even a child who places ninth can gain from competition, such as developing resilience and building strength of character.

There will also be changes in areas such as game formats, equipment and the use of substitutes. These changes were conceptualised and customised for schools in consultation with the National Youth Sports Institute,



relevant national sports associations and Sport Singapore.

In implementing the changes to the award and recognition system, however, it is important to maintain a balance between recognising effort and coddling, and this responsibility should be shared by parents, teachers and coaches.

TROPHY FOR PARTICIPATION OR FOR A WIN?

As with most topics in sport, there are two views on this.

Google the phrase "participation trophy", which has in recent years been used to criticise millennials (and their alleged sense of entitlement), and there are pages of results with articles debating the pros and cons of awarding one.

When actress Mindy Kaling was in the fourth grade (age nine or 10), her mother "put away" a trophy she received for having the "Coolest Clothes" at a basketball camp. Her mother's gently delivered reason for removing the trophy from its original position on top of the television set was this: "They gave you that trophy so you wouldn't feel bad, not because you deserved it. You should know the difference."

Kaling eventually realised that "a bunch of unearned trophies around

the house would make me hooked on awards, which is bad in general, but especially bad if you don't deserve them". That experience, she said, made her want to win another trophy, "but win it for actually doing something great".

Awarding recognition to a greater number of student-athletes may lead to children relying on external validation (whether in the form of pins, medals or plaques) to motivate them in sport and in life.

Singapore Sailing chief executive Lim Han Ee, who has a master's degree in sports psychology and has worked as a sports psychologist in the United States, cautioned that the changes to the award and recognition structure could foster a sense of entitlement.

Noting that part of the power of sport lies in learning to recover from setbacks, he also stressed the importance of children being guided when they experience such setbacks. "There is nothing wrong with not winning. With the correct mindset, they will learn and grow from it," he added.

"You can't have people play only because they get a prize... (If) someone is intrinsically motivated, they love the sport and want to develop mastery of the skills and enjoy the experience of getting

better not just for medals' sake.

"What's critical is not whether children experience a setback; it's how we support and equip them with the skills to cope. It's about how coaches, teachers and parents position themselves to teach kids how to bounce back."

Mr Lim's sentiments are best illustrated by what retired basketball star Kobe Bryant told his daughters when they finished fourth at a basketball tournament.

They did not want to accept their trophies for placing fourth, and the five-time NBA champion told them: "Get the fourth-place trophy, go home. You take the fourth-place trophy, you put it up right where you can see it, and when you wake up in the morning, you look at the trophy and you remind yourself of what you'll never win again."

If MOE wants to encourage participation and enjoyment in sport, it can do so at the intra-school level, not at the national level, some observers suggest. Mrs May Schooling, mother of Olympic swimming champion Joseph, suggests that this be done at inter-house games within school competitions. She said: "Encouraging participation and kids to be active is good, but maybe at the national level where you represent the school there

should be some (distinction)... There should be a higher level for those who maybe make the effort to train a bit more or who maybe have a bit more talent."

Having too broad-based recognition could make top student-athletes feel the value of their achievements is being diluted. "The meritocracy of sports must still exist even as mass participation is encouraged," she said.

But a different argument can be made: That it is good to give a little extra encouragement to children experiencing their first taste of sporting competition.

After all, even competitors who finish fourth to eighth at the Olympic Games are honoured with a diploma. According to a 2014 New York Times article, diplomas have been awarded since 1896, with only the winners of each event initially receiving them. This grew to include the top three finishers in 1923, the top six in 1949, and by 1981 the top eight.

Consultant psychiatrist at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre Brian Yeo acknowledged that some of the top performers in the NSG junior division may feel discouraged about not being specifically recognised, but otherwise felt there are no other downsides to the amendments.

"You're not hiding the kids from reality... I don't think children are so isolated that they cannot see beyond (these) changes. I think they are aware of reality between ages nine and 11," said Dr Yeo, whose credentials include postgraduate qualifications in child and adolescent psychiatry.

"Many of our kids are mature; they do surf the Internet and they know the timings for kids of their age in international competitions. I don't think anyone can operate in isolation; everyone knows what's happening in the world. I don't think (the changes) are intended to pull down or discourage the top three."

Children could pick up sport for many reasons, some of which could simply be to hang out with their friends and to learn something new, said Olympian Mark Chay, now the chief executive officer of the International Sports Academy. It is only when they realise that the sport makes them happy that the drive to excel follows.

The move to introduce criterion-based recognition would see students ranked within different levels of achievement, and the real test here to Mr Chay, a former swimmer, is how this is implemented.

"The banding has to be realistic. If the gold standard (at primary school level) cannot get you to the final or the school team in secondary school, there's no meaning to it," he added.

"You can't change one system and expect the secondary school system to remain the same. It has to be changed to slowly inculcate competitive values in the kids, although we'd hope this will happen naturally because there's an increased base of kids competing."

Updating school sport competitions to encourage self-mastery and make sport more fun is a good thing - so long as the changes do not blunt the competitive edge in sport.

A case for the humanities in the age of robots

As digital technology grows ever more powerful, the intellectual skills associated with the study of humanities, arts and social sciences are needed more than ever to tackle the challenges of disruption and innovation



Joseph Chinyong Liow

For The Straits Times

To say that technology is ubiquitous today is to state the obvious. Indeed, with the advent of the digital age, the influence that technology is exercising in our lives is accelerating at an alarming pace.

From the gig economy and the future of work to new pedagogies in education and the mass accumulation of data, technology is dominating conversations, shaping perspectives and driving policy decisions.

Even as we ponder the disruption occasioned by the technologies of the digital age and the new ways of doing things that they augur, machine-learning, robotics, the Internet of Things, wearable technology and 5G networks roll off the tongue in ways that would have perplexed even Aldous Huxley, the celebrated author of the futuristic dystopian novel *Brave New World*.

Is there a place for the humanities, arts and social sciences in the technological world of the future? Indeed, can these disciplines do anything to prepare us for the challenges of tomorrow?

As dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University, these are questions I get asked a lot by parents, teachers and students alike.

In response to these questions, my answer has always been categorical. Not only is there a place for these disciplines, in this present age of rapid technological transformation, we need the humanities, arts and social sciences now more than ever, especially if we are to successfully parlay this immense technological and digital

power that we are coming to possess into societal power for the good of mankind.

FROM HOW TO WHY

This is because the humanities, arts and social sciences, known collectively by the acronym Hass, equip us with the analytical paradigms and creative environments to enrich – if not change – the conversation, taking discussions of science and technology beyond the question of how to build, and deeper into realms of inquiry regarding what precisely to build (for the good of society) and why we should (or shouldn't) build them.

The keys to unlocking these conundrums turn on an understanding of the social, cultural and historical contexts, not to mention the ability to ask the right questions. Asking the pertinent questions is the skill that Hass disciplines provide.

Technology cannot explain the nature of thought and therefore cannot (indeed, should not) be our intellectual surrogate.

In this respect, I would in fact suggest that the fundamental tools required to engineer the next great leap in artificial intelligence perhaps lie not just in advances in the computational disciplines but also in how they intersect with philosophy, linguistics and the arts, all of which cast light on the human realities that contextualise the natural and material world, and that create meaning and intelligence to help us make sense of that world.

At the heart of the matter is that, rather than strive for a world where technology solves our problems, we should endeavour to create one where technology facilitates human solutions to human problems.

A simple but illustrative example is www.quora.com, which demonstrates how technology can be effectively harnessed to facilitate human engagement while solving a problem (through crowdsourcing of answers to questions).

Yet, despite the lip service paid to the importance of Hass, there is in reality still a deeply entrenched bias against its disciplines, which are still often denigrated as “soft” sciences.

Concern over the relevance of the “soft” sciences stems from the perception, deeply rooted in our society, that education provides the pathway to a well-paying job, and that one's employment prospects are arguably better served with a Stem (science,

technology, engineering and mathematics) degree because of the comparatively more specialised nature of their training, which some assume is correlated with employment.

This latter view may be increasingly outdated, but it is still palpable even though the very nature of our economy is changing in fundamental ways. At first glance, statistics also seem to bear this view out. A cursory reading of the Graduate Employment Survey compiled annually by the Ministry of Education suggests that the mean salaries of Stem graduates tend to be higher than their Hass counterparts.

MINDING AND BRIDGING THE GAP

Aside from instrumentalist and economic reasons, biases against Hass also stem from the unfortunate tendency to posit the Stem and Hass disciplines as dichotomous.

In 1959, the renowned British chemist and novelist, C.P. Snow, delivered a lecture titled *The Two Cultures*, in which he lamented the gulf that existed between the worlds of science and the humanities.

In many ways, this gulf, and the biases it spawns, still exists.

In the academic world, these biases are both embedded and perpetuated in the structure of research assessment, where qualitative review of academic accomplishment is undertaken, ironically, through the use of quantitative indicators that plot the trajectory of individual academics, programmes and universities.

Research impact is predicated on, among other things, citations.

For the uninitiated, this refers to the number of times an academic or researcher's published work is cited by others. In this manner, the collection, aggregation and centralisation of data – an academic “body count” – to borrow the Vietnam War phraseology that has become synonymous with the much-maligned Secretary of Defence of that era Robert McNamara – becomes the order of the day for purposes of assessing accomplishment and determining potential.

This becomes a problem because the nature of the production of scholarship in the humanities and social science fields differs from what takes place in the Stem fields.

It is not uncommon to see up to a dozen authors on a science or engineering essay or article. The social sciences, and humanities in particular, are far lonelier

endeavours by comparison. To be sure, co-authored papers and articles are increasing in numbers, but even then, we are talking of three, at best four, authors.

For the humanities disciplines such as literature, history and philosophy, it remains the case that more often than not, scholarship is produced by single authors.

Moreover, research and writing books remain the norm in many disciplines within the Hass fields; it is considerably less so for the Stem disciplines. The net result is that, in terms of quantity, scholars in Stem fields may appear on balance to be more productive than their non-Stem colleagues.

And then, there is the tyranny of time. Whether in Stem or Hass fields, researchers today find themselves having to beat the clock, thrust into a race against time to make their research relevant.

New faculty typically get first contracts ranging between three and four years, and research grants, which are increasingly becoming a non-negotiable KPI (key performance indicator) for academics, run for more or less the same duration. What this means quite simply, is that whatever you are working on as an academic had better bear some fruit within the first three years.

We rail against the instant gratification culture that besets us today, yet it seems to have crept into the research world as well.

Again, this poses a particularly challenging problem for Hass, where the cycle of publication in top-tier journals tends to be longer than those in Stem fields. More fundamentally, more reflective work whose value unfolds over a longer period of time as it creates

Given how important teamwork in the laboratory is for science, engineering and the development of new technologies, the benefits of exposure to the humanities, which teach how to understand and relate to others, should really be self-evident.

new knowledge of enduring significance will find itself at a structural disadvantage in such a climate.

DISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION: THE NEXT FRONTIER

My intent here is not to downplay Stem. That would be both ill-informed and foolish. The Stem fields are absolutely integral to the future of our economy and society.

Stem will continue to underpin everything from supply chains and food production to precision medicine and cyber security.

In fact, in the realm of education, I believe it is just as essential for those with Hass backgrounds to develop some familiarity with coding as it is for Stem students to cultivate a critical appreciation of the arts and literature.

This is because the problems of tomorrow will not fit neatly into static curricula or disciplinary boundaries.

Rather, they are likely to be increasingly complex with multiple facets, and hence the need to develop a range of skill sets that branch beyond any single discipline or approach – in other words, beyond specialisation.

Of course, this is not to say that specialists are not needed for the future economy. Rather, it is to make the case that the value of problem-solving and creative thinking will become increasingly important, and these skills are best developed through blended learning rather than disciplinary specialisation.

Consider, for instance, complex calculus, which requires a detailed understanding of concepts that frame a problem rather than merely the ability to memorise methods to solve a problem.

This means that the requisite skill sets would include creativity and the ability to conceptualise abstract theory. These skills are remarkably similar to textual analysis that is the cornerstone of literature.

Similarly, given how important teamwork in the laboratory is for science, engineering and the development of new technologies, the benefits of exposure to the humanities, which teach how to understand and relate to others, should really be self-evident.

Ultimately, the point is that Stem and Hass must co-exist and, not only that, they must complement each other in the effort to create a modern economy that is also sustainable and empathetic, for that is where our future must lie.

Otherwise, we will be left to bemoan the words of Dr Ian Malcolm, the fictional character played by Jeff Goldblum in the movie *Jurassic Park*, who warned: “Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should.”

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The robot-proof skills that give women an edge in the age of AI

Sarah O'Connor

The latest panic about artificial intelligence (AI) is that it will deal a blow to women in the workplace. Women accustomed to gloomy headlines may have met this one with a fatalistic shrug. But it is worth interrogating why on earth it might be true.

The concerns are legitimate enough, but they fail to appreciate the big ways in which the world of work is going to change. In fact, it is quite possible the age of AI will belong to women. Men are the ones in danger of being left behind.

There are admittedly some reasons to worry about women. Some AI tools may be biased against them – a risk for any group that has been historically under-represented in the workplace. Because machine learning tends to learn from historical data, it can perpetuate patterns from the past into the future.

Amazon reportedly discovered a few years ago that an experimental recruitment tool, based on 10 years' worth of job application data, had taught itself to penalise curricula vitae that contained the word “women's”, such as “captain of the women's hockey team”.

On top of that, data from LinkedIn profiles suggests 78 per cent of the people working in AI are men. Not only are they shaping the future, they are also occupying some of the best new jobs to be created in recent years. A hiring



A robot barista making coffee in San Francisco. As the AI era dawns, instead of labelling skills such as empathy and persuasion “soft skills” with connotations of femininity, they should be called “robot-proof skills” that neither men nor women can afford to face the 21st century without, the writer says. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

war has sent the salaries of people with machine learning doctorates into the stratosphere.

It is right to pay attention to these problems and work on solutions. Algorithms shouldn't be given power without transparency, accountability, and human checks and balances. Top AI jobs should be held by a more diverse set of smart people.

But it is also important to remember that only a small number of the jobs of the future will actually involve creating algorithms. Far more of us will find our work reshaped and revalued by them. And it is here that women may have the advantage.

As machines become better at many cognitive tasks, it is likely that the skills they are relatively bad at will become more valuable. This list includes creative problem-solving, empathy, negotiation and persuasion.

As Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane has put it, “the high-skill, high-pay jobs of the future may involve skills better measured by EQs (a measure of emotional intelligence) than IQs”.

There is no reason why men should not excel at these but historically, such skills have been more identified with – and

encouraged in – women.

Indeed, a new research paper from the University of Zurich argues the trend predicted by Mr Haldane has already begun. In the US since the 1980s, the probability of a college-educated man ending up in a highly skilled cognitive job has fallen, while the probability of a college-educated woman achieving the same feat has increased.

The author argues this is connected to increasing demand in these jobs for supplementary skills such as emotional intelligence, which has given women an edge.

It is important not to get too carried away. The trend identified in the paper has only gone some way to closing the gender gap in top jobs. And there is no sign yet of a reappraisal of the value of emotional skills in jobs such as social care, which remain some of the worst paid in the economy.

But as the AI era dawns, it is the right moment to overhaul the way we value these skills, and the way we teach them. With an eye on the demands of the future, we are trying to persuade girls that coding is not just for boys. So why aren't we also trying to persuade boys that empathy is not just for girls?

We could start by changing the language we use. For too long, we have talked about “soft skills”, with connotations of femininity and a lack of rigour. Let's call them what they are: “robot-proof skills” that neither men nor women can afford to face the 21st century without.

FINANCIAL TIMES



An Emirates A-380 in the skies above the French Riviera city of Nice. Superjumbos rely on transporting large numbers of passengers between major hub airports, but travellers increasingly prefer to fly direct to their destinations, which typically requires smaller, more efficient flying machines. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Time for a Paris Agreement on scientific research

Elizabeth H. Blackburn

Over the past century, industrialised nations around the world have built robust government-funded national research enterprises, none more formidable than the United States' National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation.

Each of these organisations – including Japan's Riken, Inserm in France, Britain's Medical Research Council and the recently formed European Research Council – has advanced science by infusing the universal human impulse for discovery with national or regional pride.

Yet Pythagoras' theorem does not apply to triangles drawn solely in Greece, nor does Mendeleev's periodic table describe chemical elements found only in Russia, a point made by the great Russian playwright and physician Anton Chekhov with characteristic succinctness in the Notebook: "There is no national science, just as there is no national multiplication table; what is national is no longer science."

Despite the unarguable success of the nationally focused model of science that has dominated the past hundred years, the truly vexing problems now facing humanity – such as environmental degradation, the global climate crisis and its effects on health, emerging infectious diseases and pandemics, and the need for alternative energy sources – call for building something new: a global framework to support fundamental scientific research that cleaves more closely to Chekhov's ideal.

This week in Washington, scientists from around the world will exchange ideas at the annual meeting of the American Association of the Advancement of Science during 13 sessions held under the banner of "Cultivating Borderless Research", reflecting a mounting interest among scientists in transcending national and regional barriers.

Fortunately, an inspiring model of international commitment for the common benefit already exists in the Paris Agreement for climate change mitigation. The 2015 agreement, which recognises global climate change as one of the most daunting challenges faced by humankind, has the signatures of 194 nations plus the European Union, and lays out commitments to support the collective actions needed for long-term global benefit.

Though the Paris Agreement has been subject to criticism that it is based on aspirations rather than mandates, it is nonetheless an unprecedented achievement in global cooperation towards a shared and urgent goal and a powerful example of what humanity can achieve through inclusive, careful negotiations conducted in good faith.

By implementing the equivalent of a Paris Agreement for long-term, cooperative, international support of scientific research – to complement the nation-based organisations that have served us so well – we can better embrace far-sighted, strategic scientific planning.

Arming the world with collectively acquired new scientific knowledge would allow us to anticipate crises that ultimately affect us all, freeing us from the reactive stances we so frequently must adopt in response to unexpected challenges.

A global model would also provide the means to build a sustainable source of funding and freely shared scientific tools. When fiscal resources for science are bound up in national politics, year-to-year funding proposals can be unpredictable and even capricious.

The Paris Agreement crucially includes robust funding to achieve its objectives, via a Green Climate Fund that has so far attracted more than US\$10 billion (\$13.6 billion) in pledges.

Notably, these pledges have come not just from affluent, highly industrialised countries but also from a diverse range of nations, including Mexico, Indonesia and Vietnam.

The current concentration of scientific activity in a small number of rich nations excludes the perspectives and talents of millions who stand ready to contribute to science.

By actively sharing technology and data through a global framework and by building on current momentum to open the scientific publishing process to all, we can greatly accelerate the pace of discovery and increase the diversity and richness of the research we pursue.

One might wonder why such global issues should be of concern to a scientist such as myself, since my decades of work on telomeres – tiny units of DNA that cap and protect the ends of chromosomes – have focused on biological events at a microscopic scale.

But telomeres are known to be involved in several diseases, and they may play an important role in extending the quality of the human lifespan. Many environmental factors, from pollutants to stressful living conditions (including a lack of access to healthy food or experiencing discrimination), affect telomeres. These factors are themselves profoundly determined by large social and economic forces that do not respect national boundaries.

So, as fulfilling as it has been to explore these intriguing sub-cellular structures at the lab bench, I have come to see that the view from my window is as important to my work as the view through my microscope.

I have presented preliminary ideas on a global science framework at several international forums and received an enthusiastic response.

It is my hope that young scientists and future scientists just coming of age can imagine, and eventually realise, a global pact for science – a science based on shared goals and resources, transparency and strategic long-range thinking. We would all stand to benefit. WASHINGTON POST

• Elizabeth H. Blackburn is a Nobel laureate and professor emerita at the University of California at San Francisco.

order for eight A-380s.

A further slide seems imminent, with talk that Emirates – which still has more than 50 A-380s on order – is looking to convert some of that to the smaller and more efficient A-350.

It is not good news for Airbus, given that the Dubai-based carrier, the biggest A-380 operator with about 110 of the giants, is possibly the only airline customer keeping the A-380 programme alive.

Airbus, which has cut its production rate for the A-380 to just eight aircraft per year from this year onwards, seems determined to keep the factory going for the next few years at least.

Perhaps it is stubbornly holding out for a miracle, a renewed interest in the giant jet.

Sadly, there seems to be little, if any, hope that the plane-maker, which spent about US\$25 billion (\$34 billion) to develop the aircraft, will ever come close to recouping the amount.

With just one real customer in Emirates, it is unviable for the A-380 programme to continue for much longer.

In 2007, Airbus made history when president and chief executive officer Tom Enders officially handed over the first A-380 – the biggest passenger plane ever to be built – to launch customer SIA.

The grand event attended by more than 500 guests was held at Airbus' delivery centre in Toulouse, France.

In April this year, Mr Enders will retire, paving the way for Airbus (commercial aircraft) president Guillaume Faury to take over.

Pulling the plug on the production of the much-loved but economically unviable A-380 programme would be a good way to go.

The good news for travellers is that the A-380s and B-747s already flying will continue to soar through the skies for many years to come.

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A GOOD RUN FOR THE B-747

When American chief engineer Joe Sutter and his team at Boeing sat down in the 1960s to design the B-747, they set out to build an aircraft that could be used both as a passenger carrier and a cargo plane.

Convinced that the future of passenger flights belonged to supersonic aircraft, the team was prepared that the B-747 could one day be good only for cargo services.

With this in mind, the plane was designed with a flip-up nose, hinged at the top to make it easy to load and unload even large cargo items quickly.

The cockpit got in the way so designers added the iconic hump to house the pilot cabin.

From its first commercial flight in 1970, the B-747 went on to become a big hit with more than 1,500 jets built to date.

"It's all about timing", said aviation analyst Shukor Yusof from Endau Analytics.

"The B-747 came at a time when intercontinental long-haul travel was about to take off... There was no competition when it was launched and jet fuel was relatively inexpensive, which made the four-engined aircraft a viable proposition for airlines."

Half a century later, though, the B-747 is starting to disappear from the skies as SIA, Qantas, British Airways, Lufthansa and other major carriers phase them out in favour of newer twin-engined and more efficient planes like the A-350 and B-777s.

SIA operated its last B-747 flight in 2012, Qantas says it will phase out its remaining 747s by 2020 and British Airways will do the same by 2024.

Last year, Boeing received just 18 orders for its jumbo jet; the bulk from logistics giant UPS, which bought 14 freighters.

A-380 NEVER REALLY HAD A FIGHTING CHANCE

Notwithstanding its glorious entry into commercial service in SIA colours, the A-380 could not have

made its debut at a worse time.

Professor Guido Gianasso, academic director of the Iata-Nanyang Advanced Management Programme at Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School, said: "Its introduction into service coincided with the global financial crisis and the hardest times in the history of commercial aviation."

Several technical issues also emerged over the years, from problems with its Rolls-Royce engines to cracks in wing fittings.

Last year alone, close to 80 A-380 international flights were cancelled due to technical problems, Prof Gianasso pointed out.

High fuel prices in the last decade, which coincided with increasing competition among global carriers for market share and profits, also worked against the viability of the four-engined giant.

Some analysts even say that Airbus got it wrong, right from the start.

"The commercial assumptions behind the launch of the A-380 have proved wrong," said Prof Gianasso.

Superjumbos rely on transporting large numbers of passengers between major hub airports like Changi, Dubai and Heathrow, from where they would connect to smaller airports.

Unfortunately for Airbus, travellers increasingly prefer to fly direct to their destinations, which typically requires smaller aircraft.

In addition, passengers – particularly in first and business class – also expect a spread of departure times to suit their needs.

"The market has given its verdict," said Prof Gianasso, noting that A-380 sales have stagnated.

Airbus said on its website that as at Jan 31, it had received 313 orders for the aircraft, with 234 planes delivered – leaving a backlog of about 80 A-380s.

That number has since dropped after Qantas announced last week that it had cancelled an outstanding



Karamjit Kaur

Senior Aviation Correspondent

When it comes to planes, big is clearly not better.

On Sept 30, 1968, the world got its first glimpse of the Boeing 747, as the jumbo jet with its distinctive hump rolled out of a factory in Everett, Washington.

It was dubbed Queen of the Skies, a title it eventually gave up almost four decades later to the Airbus 380 – an even bigger flying machine designed to carry as many as 555 passengers in a three-class configuration or 853 passengers in a single-class economy configuration.

On Oct 25, 2007, Singapore Airlines (SIA) became the first to fly the A-380 commercially – from Singapore to Sydney.

Twelve years later, the B-747 and A-380, built to transport large numbers of air travellers across major airports, have become irrelevant to passenger airlines.

Orders have stagnated, while those still flying are slowly but surely being phased out.

The skies now belong to smaller, more efficient flying machines that come with two instead of four engines that power the bigger birds.

And while big airports that can accommodate the giant jets continue to grow, travellers are increasingly opting for point-to-point services instead of having to fly through major hubs. This fuels the need for smaller aircraft.

Is this the end of the runway for jumbo jets?

The Twitter takeover of politics is just getting started

Tyler Cowen

The latest political controversy in Washington involves United States Representative Ilhan Omar tweeting and insinuating that American political support for Israel is driven by Jewish money and lobbying. Leaving aside her views for now, the general trend is striking: Social media is allowing individual politicians to further their own careers at the expense of their party's reputation.

The result is that US politics is quickly changing into a parade of celebrities.

Put yourself in Ms Omar's shoes. You are a freshman representative in a group of 435. Most of your cohort will never receive national recognition, and as a Muslim woman, perhaps your hold on the seat is not entirely secure. You will probably never run for president, or even Senate, so your future is not tied very closely to that of the Democratic Party.

At some point you realise that if you tweet about Israel, you will get attention. You probably believe in what you are saying, and you think your opinions will contribute to the dialogue. But the tweets will also make you a national celebrity. That may help your future ability to get a book contract, hit the lecture circuit, or join a lobbying or non-profit firm.

Even if most Americans find your views objectionable, there will be a place for you in a country this large, wealthy and diverse.

I have found that when people perceive their self-interest and sense of morality to be in harmony, they are very likely to act in accordance with them. And so it came to pass.

Ms Omar started tweeting about Israel, including the problematic remark about the influence of Jewish money; people were offended and accused her of anti-Semitism, and she has since apologised.

But don't be too distracted by the apology: She definitely got people talking about one of her preferred issues, and she raised her profile significantly. And she hasn't withdrawn her main point.

Of course, it is the Democratic Party that ends up looking bad. For one thing, most Americans are pro-Israel. Even if the tweets had been less controversial, the mere act of talking about Israel exposes more fissures in the Democratic coalition than among Republicans.

Or consider Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, arguably a genius on social media. She is attracting more attention than most (all?) of the Democratic presidential candidates, and now has over three million Twitter followers. She has been setting the



PHOTOS: EPA-EFE, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ms Ilhan Omar (above) started tweeting about Israel, including the problematic remark about the influence of Jewish money; people were offended and accused her of anti-Semitism, and she has since apologised... She definitely got people talking about one of her preferred issues, and she raised her profile significantly.

Democratic agenda on both tax and environmental policy, and spurring a general sense among primary voters that the party ought to be moving further to the political left.

But is this all good for the Democratic Party? The positive spin would be that she is revitalising debate in the party and giving it greater appeal to the young.

The negative spin is that she is pushing the primary candidates too far to the left, and making them look tired and stale compared with her energy and innovativeness.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's

response to her Green New Deal idea was striking: "It will be one of several or maybe many suggestions that we receive. The green dream, or whatever they call it, nobody knows what it is, but they're for it, right?"

No matter what the final result may be, the upstarts have been empowered relative to the establishment.

The true innovator in all of this, of course, is President Donald Trump. He used Twitter to help himself get elected, at the expense of the traditional view of what the Republican Party should be. This

trend will almost certainly continue and intensify.

Most politicians do not have excellent social media skills, but many will try to get noticed and have an impact (or at least hire staff who will). As more politicians raise their game on social media, more of these attempts will hit home.

Ms Ocasio-Cortez will have competition. The influence and reach of political celebrities will grow stronger, and the parties will become weaker yet.

This may be a more important trend than what is sometimes

called political polarisation.

But what does this new, more intense celebrity culture mean for actual outcomes? The more power and influence that individual communicators wield over public opinion, the harder it will be for a sitting president to get things done. (The best option, see above, will be to make your case and engage your adversaries on social media.)

The harder it will be for an aspirant party to put forward a coherent, predictable and actionable political programme. Finally, the issues that are easier to

express on social media will become the more important ones.

Technocratic dreams will fade, and fiery rhetoric and identity politics will rule the day.

And if you think this is the political world we are already living in, rest assured: It has just barely started. BLOOMBERG

• Tyler Cowen, a Bloomberg Opinion columnist, is a professor of economics at George Mason University. His books include *The Complacent Class: The Self-Defeating Quest For The American Dream*.



Or consider Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (above), arguably a genius on social media. She is attracting more attention than most (all?) of the Democratic presidential candidates, and now has over three million Twitter followers.

Google, fake news and the crisis of truth

Bernard-Henri Levy

Invited by Google Europe to attend a brainstorming session in Paris on the decline of truth, the rise of fake news and ways to counter both, I began my presentation by placing the problem in historical context.

I cited George Orwell's *Looking Back On The Spanish War*, in which the author explains that for him, "history stopped in 1936" because it was there, in Spain, that he discovered for the first time, "newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts".

It was there that he sensed that "the very concept of objective truth", ruined by fascism in its red and brown forms, was "fading out of the world". And it was there, in effect, that men like Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels ("I'm the one who decides who is Jewish and who isn't") and later, United States President Donald Trump (and his "alternative facts") became possible.

But, as I went on to point out, several intellectual shake-ups occurred before and after the rise of totalitarianism.

First, the Kantian "critique", which separated the noumenal from the phenomenal realm, limited our knowledge to the

phenomenal realm and posited that we can know phenomena only to the extent that our senses, understanding and reason allow. This critique injects into our relationship with truth a measure of subjectivity of which Brexit's proponents might be today's willing victims.

Second, a Nietzschean "perspectivism" turned truth into a "point of view" and judged to be "true" that point of view that makes a being stronger, and "false" that which saddens or diminishes him. It triggered a second intellectual earthquake, the aftershocks of which necessarily rippled through political systems, giving rise to the metaphysical possibility of leaders such as, say, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

And third, there was the "deconstructionism" of the post-Nietzscheans. By historicising the "will to truth" (philosopher Michel Foucault), putting truth "in quotation marks" (philosopher Jacques Derrida), separating the sign from its referent (philosopher Louis Althusser) and miring the obvious in a miasma of charts and graphs (anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss) or tying it up in Borromean knots (psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan), they probably caused us to lose contact with the simple, robust and irrefutable

aspects of the truth.

I then focused on the responsibility of the Internet and Gafa (Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon) for the following sequence of events:

First, an almost infinite amount of speech is set free by digital democracy. The Web then becomes a crowd, a free-for-all, where everyone shows up armed with his or her personal opinions, convictions and truth. And, at the end of a shift that was nearly imperceptible amid the virtual roar of tweets, retweets and posts, we demand for our newly affirmed truth the same respect that was paid to the old truth.

We started with the equal right to express our beliefs. We wound up conceding that all expressed beliefs have equal value. We began by asking simply to be heard, then demanded that listeners respect our utterances, whatever they may think of them, and ended by warning them not to rank one statement above another or assert that there might be a hierarchy of truths.

We thought we were democratising the "courage of truth" that was so dear to the later Foucault. We thought we were giving every friend of the truth the technical means with which to contribute, boldly but modestly,

to the adventures of knowledge.

Instead, we convened a feeding frenzy. Truth's body was laid out on the table and, fuelled by a cannibalistic urge, we set to tearing it apart. Each of us stitched together a patchwork of certitude and suspicion from the bloody, putrid shreds.

And this spectacle promptly gave way, minus Hellenic elegance, to the perversity of a new generation of Sophists holding that truth is a wavering shadow, that man is the measure of all things and that the truth of each is precisely equal to that of his neighbour.

Given this, and because Google Europe was hosting this event, I proposed to Carlo d'Asaro Biondo, the company's president for partnerships and strategic relations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, three concrete and eminently strategic ideas.

The first proposal is a hall of shame, where, in partnership with the world's 50, 100 or 200 largest newspapers, the most dangerous fake-news items at any given moment would be listed in real time.

Second, a competition on the model of France's 18th-century academies would be held. Denizens of the Web would propose a document, video or other work whose power of truth or satire could neutralise the most harmful

fake news, with the winner funded to produce the proposed work.

And finally, 2½ centuries after Diderot, a new encyclopaedia – yes, an encyclopaedia, a real one, the opposite of Wikipedia and its turbid entries – would be produced. Who other than one of the global tech firms has the power – should it decide to use it – to bring together thousands of real scholars capable of drawing up an inventory of the knowledge currently available to us in every discipline?

The choice is clear:

- Encyclopaedia or ignorance.
- Mend the fabric of the truth or resign ourselves to its definitive rending.

Plunge deeper into the Cave, dim and clamorous, or begin to look for the way out. I would not want to lend undue importance to a single Google event. But couldn't it be taken as a wake-up call, a challenge to begin a process of critical questioning?

Might not those who are responsible for the worst be willing to shoulder some responsibility for repairing the damage, for building up after tearing down? If not them, who? PROJECT SYNDICATE

• Bernard-Henri Levy is one of the founders of the *Nouveaux Philosophes* (New Philosophers) movement.

BIG PICTURE

WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 33 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 42 to 53 (Moderate)



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Slow boat to a wet harvest

Padding carefully, Cambodian farmers use boats to harvest water mimosa plants at this farm in Phnom Penh. These plants are often considered a nuisance as they grow quickly, forming a thick carpet over water surfaces, which can sometimes choke waterways. In Cambodia, however, the young leaves, shoot tips and pods of the plant are a common sight in Cambodian dishes – eaten raw in a salad or used in stir-fries and curries. Water mimosa is cultivated much like rice, in wet conditions.

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We also need to be mindful that there are many pet boarders who are do-gooders – well-meaning pet lovers who provide pet boarding facilities.

MS SUN XUELING, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for National Development, in Parliament yesterday **B5**



Married couple Tan Gui Ping and Lin Ming from Fujian, China, are visiting Singapore for the first time. China is the biggest source of tourists to Singapore, accounting for 3.4 million visitors who spent \$3.16 billion between January and September last year. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Tourist arrivals, spending at record highs

Trump-Kim summit and Crazy Rich Asians film put Singapore in the global spotlight

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

Singapore's turn in the global spotlight helped propel tourist arrivals and spending to record highs for the third straight year. Total arrivals last year rose 6.2 per cent to 18.5 million, while tourism receipts climbed 1 per cent to \$27.1 billion, according to preliminary estimates released by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) yesterday.

Two events last year put the country on the global stage: the historic meeting between American President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and the release of Hollywood film Crazy Rich Asians, which was set here.

STB said organic search interest in Singapore rose by more than three times in the United States during the movie's release, according to Google data, while there was a 110 per cent spike in searches on travel-planning site Orbitz.

STB chief executive Keith Tan said

the Trump-Kim summit and other major events held here last year had huge marketing value to Singapore.

Google registered more than two million hits on the phrase "where is Singapore" from the US alone a day before the summit, he added.

Still, while the number of tourist arrivals exceeded STB's forecast, spending did not keep pace. This is partly because more visitors came for a day trip or as a stop on a longer journey, resulting in shorter stays and less spending on gifts, STB said.

Visitors spent less on shopping (down 14 per cent), food and beverage (down 4 per cent) and accommodation (down 5 per cent) for the first three quarters of last year, compared with the same period in 2017.

However, spending on sightseeing, entertainment and gaming rose 6 per cent, making it the second biggest slice of the pie.

An increase in airfare revenues, led by more visitors arriving on local full-service carriers, helped a miscellaneous category – that in-

cludes local transportation and medical tourism – to grow by 21 per cent to \$5.76 billion, forming the largest share of spending.

Visitor arrivals grew across almost all top 15 markets, with the biggest jumps coming from the US, Britain, India and Vietnam. More flights between some of these countries and Singapore and greater demand for travel to and within the Asia-Pacific contributed to this growth, STB said.

China remained the biggest source of visitors and tourist spending, with 3.4 million visitors spending \$3.16 billion here from January to September. Nearly half of the spending was on shopping.

Indonesia and India also held on to their second and third places in tourist arrivals and spending.

The business events, hotel and cruise sectors all registered growth.

There was a 14 per cent increase in visitors for business travel, and meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions for the first three quarters. They spent \$3.4 billion, 10 per cent more than in 2017.

Gazetted hotel room revenue went up by 7.4 per cent to \$4 billion, while the cruise industry continued its double-digit year-on-year growth. Passenger traffic rose 35 per cent to 1.87 million, a record high for the fourth year in a row, led by growth from the Indian market and new cruise offerings.

For this year, STB forecasts tourism receipts to grow by 1 to 3 per cent and visitor arrivals to be 18.7 million to 19.2 million, an increase of 1 to 4 per cent.

STB seeks "quality tourism" over quantity and is cautious of the country becoming "overly touristed", said Mr Tan.

"We are mindful to find a balance so that tourism does not create disamenities for our locals and add strain to our infrastructure."

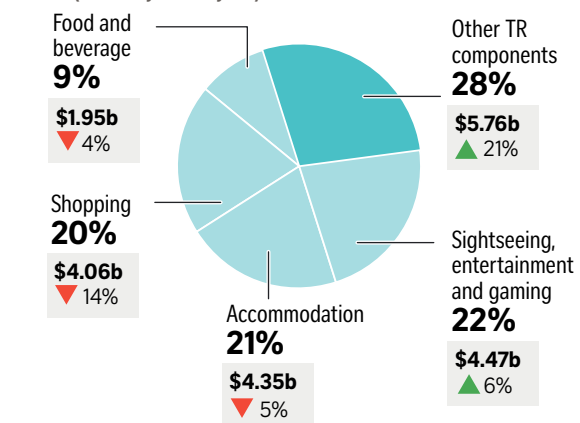
tiffanyt@sph.com.sg

SEE FORUM B10

How tourism fared in 2018

FULL-YEAR TOURISM SPENDING UP 1% TO \$27.1 BILLION

Tourism receipts (TR) for January to September 2018: \$20.6b (▲ 1.1% year on year)



NOTE: Sightseeing, entertainment and gaming includes entrance fees to attractions and nightspots, expenditure on day tours, leisure events as well as entertainment at the integrated resorts. Other TR components include expenditure on airfares on Singapore-based carriers, port taxes, local transportation, and business, medical, education and transit visitors.

VISITOR ARRIVALS ROSE 6.2% TO 18.5 MILLION

Rank		(000)	% change
1	China	3,417	▲ 6%
2	Indonesia	3,021	▲ 2%
3	India	1,442	▲ 13%
4	Malaysia	1,254	▲ 7%
5	Australia	1,107	▲ 2%
6	Japan	830	▲ 5%
7	Philippines	778	▲ 6%
8	US	643	▲ 14%
9	South Korea	629	0%
10	Vietnam	592	▲ 11%
	Britain	589	▲ 13%
	France	205	▲ 17%
	Canada	130	▲ 23%
	Cambodia	98	▲ 26%
Other countries with double-digit growth			

Source: SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

STB set to tackle slower spending

While the number of tourist arrivals last year exceeded forecasts, spending grew by just 1 per cent, its poorest performance since 2015.

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) chief executive Keith Tan, who took the reins last October, stressed that the amount is still a historical high.

But he attributed the slower pace of spending to three factors: a global trend of consumers travelling more but spending less, currency fluctuations in some of the Republic's top source markets, and more visitors who spend less time here.

Eight of Singapore's 14 top source markets saw their currencies depreciate last year to their lowest levels against the Singapore dollar since 2015, said Mr Tan, possibly affecting spending habits.

There was also an increase in day trippers, visitors pairing Singapore with other cities and cruise passengers who make brief stopovers, he noted.

Mr Tan outlined the STB's overall retail strategy to help recapture shoppers, which includes tackling the "growing concern about whether our shopping is becoming a bit more homogenised".

"STB will work with forward-looking mall owners and retailers who are already introducing new concepts in entertainment, leisure and play to their malls," he said, adding that the agency will "use the levers at our disposal" to promote them to travellers.

The planned rejuvenation of Orchard Road also opens up possibilities for new brands and concepts to shun large upfront investments in brick-and-mortar stores for pop-ups to test the market, he said.

While it transforms into a lifestyle destination, STB will also promote shopping destinations in precincts like Kampong Glam, and help local designers to upgrade their skills and processes.

"As people are now more used to buying things online, our own local retailers have to up their game to make sure that they can compete," said Mr Tan.

Dr Michael Chiam, senior tourism lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, said slower spending growth is a global trend as Chinese travellers buy less luxury goods abroad and more young people with limited resources travel. STB's plans, particularly in helping to build up local brands, will "hopefully yield fruit, but in the short term we will face headwinds just like other cities", he said.

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

87 couples to wed on Day of Love

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs Correspondent

Love is in the air as a total of 87 couples will be registering their marriages today.

This is the largest number of solemnisations on Valentine's Day since 2016 when 66 couples said "I do", according to a Registry of Marriages (ROM) statement yesterday. Last year, 65 couples wed on Feb 14.

The most popular Valentine's Day for marriage in Singapore was in 1995 when 1,082 couples tied the knot. That day coincided with the 15th day of Chinese New Year, which is also known as Yuan Xiao Jie, or the Chinese equivalent of Valentine's Day. The numbers refer only to non-Muslim marriages.

Among the couples getting married today are service engineer Pang Keng Hao, 29, and Miss Yap Wei Xuan, a 26-year-old research engineer. Mr Pang said: "We chose



Mr Pang Keng Hao, 29, and his bride-to-be Yap Wei Xuan, 26. The couple have been dating for nine years. PHOTO: COURTESY OF PANG KENG HAO

Valentine's Day as it's a very memorable day for couples. It's also easy to remember our wedding anniversary."

The couple met while studying at Nanyang Polytechnic and have been dating for nine years.

Her smile captured his heart, said

Mr Pang. "She's straightforward and candid. I find her very real and cute. She's very comfortable being herself and that captivates me," he added.

About four years ago, he proposed to Miss Yap. They will get the keys to their Build-To-Order flat by the middle of this year and will hold their customary Chinese wedding reception this October.

Another couple who will be exchanging marriage vows are Mr Loo Zhi Wei, who is serving national service, and Miss Valerie Chew, a purchaser. Both are 23.

They chose the date as it falls on the fourth anniversary of the duo getting together as a couple after they met while studying at Republic Polytechnic.

Mr Loo said: "I asked her to be my girlfriend on Valentine's Day. So I thought it will be nice to get married on Valentine's Day too."

As part of its Valentine's Day celebrations, ROM is launching a campaign today to get couples to share memories of their solemnisation.

"My ROM story" is jointly organised by the Ministry of Social and Family Development – the parent ministry of ROM – and the Singapore Memory Project.

Members of the public can share their photos and memories of ROM, including what they remember of the building, at www.singaporememory.sg/campaigns/myromstory.

ROM is also hosting a National Heritage Board exhibition called "Romance, Hopes and Dreams" from now until March 1. It highlights the significance of wedding customs and rituals of the major ethnic groups here.

theresat@sph.com.sg

Singapore’s criminal law framework will be undergoing a major revision following changes proposed in Parliament earlier this week. Among the slew of proposals that stood out are provisions that punish those who witness a case of abuse but do nothing to stop it and updates to certain sexual offences that would also recognise men as victims of rape. [The Straits Times](#) speaks to legal professionals and experts on what these changes signify.

Experts laud move to protect victims

Cara Wong

Those who fail to take steps to protect their children, maids or disabled charges from being abused could soon be punished under new provisions proposed in the Criminal Law Reform Bill tabled in Parliament on Monday.

Two provisions spelt out punishments for bystanders who know of but fail to take steps to prevent the neglect or abuse of three types of victims: maids, young children and the mentally or physically infirm.

This move is a step in the right direction to enhance the protection of victims who cannot defend themselves, said lawyers and experts. The Straits Times spoke to, although some expressed concern that it would be difficult to enforce in practice, despite its limited

scope of target offenders.

Only bystanders who are related to the victim will be penalised under these provisions. For example, in the case of maid abuse, the bystander has to be an employer, a member of the employer’s household or an employment agent in order to be charged with an offence.

For child abuse or abuse of vulnerable people – disabled people who cannot protect themselves – only caregivers or those who have charge or custody of the victims are liable.

The maximum penalty for such bystanders is a proposed jail term of up to 14 years and a fine of \$40,000 for those who allow ill-treatment of a child which results in the child’s death, and seven years and a fine of \$20,000 for those who allow the abuse of domestic workers and vulnerable people that results in their death.

Such a move imposes a duty on bystanders to intervene where they could reasonably be expected to and is likely triggered by “horrendous” child and maid abuse cases that made headlines in recent years, said lawyers ST spoke to.

Lawyer Amolat Singh said the new provisions give “an added weapon in the prosecutor’s arsenal to go after people who should have done something but didn’t”.

However, he noted this is “not a blanket imposition of duty on everyone”. For example, a person who witnesses abuse in a flat while walking along a corridor would not get into trouble under this provision as he has no connection to the victims in this case, said Mr Singh.

“To impose a duty on all and sundry is too onerous, therefore the proposed changes have demarcated the boundaries of this responsibility very clearly,” he added.

Lawyer A. Sangeetha noted that this law would be most handy in family situations. “Due to family dynamics, a person might be unwilling to intervene and the whole reason for bringing up this provision is to take that mindset away, to make sure that people don’t get caught up by personal relationships and not take action,” she said.

A husband who knows his wife abuses their maid, but does not try to stop her, could now be taken to task, instead of simply being let off with a warning, she added.

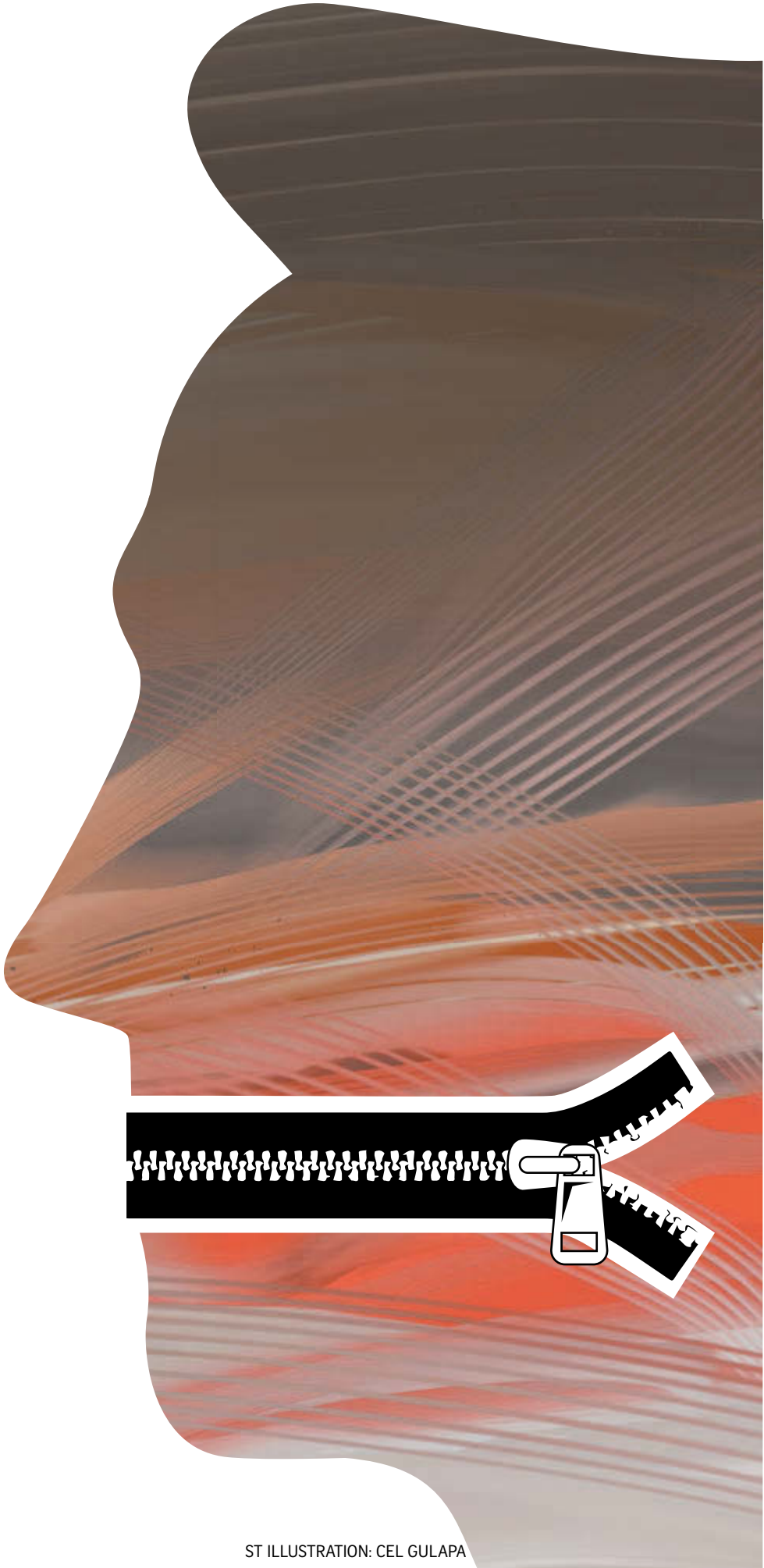
However, she was concerned about the scope of the law as it is worded such that bystanders would be penalised as long as “there is reason to believe” that abuse has happened. “It moves away from what the individual actually believed or saw, to what it should have been,” she added.

Lawyer Sunil Sudheesan said another operational problem would be that bystanders would have difficulty finding evidence to prove they did not know of the abuse.

Child protection specialists and foreign worker activists were also concerned about how the law might be enforced.

Ms Serene Yeo, director of Big Love Child Protection Specialist Centre, noted that there are many limiting factors that prevent a person from reporting abuse, particularly in family settings. “What if they relied on (the abuser) for financial support, or what if the wife is on a dependant’s pass? It’s more complicated than just putting the law in place that will prevent abuse.”

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ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

Proposed changes to give equal rights to both genders

Tan Tam Mei

By the letter of the law, there are no male rape victims in Singapore. But this is set to change.

Under proposed amendments to the Penal Code introduced in Parliament on Monday, men will be considered victims of rape if they are penetrated by another man against their will. The Criminal Law Reform Bill also recognises that a woman can violate a man by forcing him to have sex with her, and also acknowledges that a man’s modesty can be insulted.

The Bill will widen the ambit of rape, sexual assault and insult to modesty crimes to make them more gender neutral. Experts said the proposed changes will give equal rights and protection to both genders.

There was consensus that making these laws gender neutral is a step forward in legally recognising that men, too, can be victims and that women can also be aggressors.

The head of Association of Women for Action and Research’s (Aware) Sexual Assault Care Centre, Ms Anisha Joseph, said: “This is a wholly necessary and vital change, because you can be a sexual

assault victim or perpetrator regardless of your gender. We need our laws to reflect that reality.”

Currently, rape is narrowly defined as any man who penetrates a woman’s vagina with his penis without her consent. The changes expand the definition of rape to include two other types of penile penetration, but it still means women cannot be considered rapists.

The change to gender neutrality “victim-wise” is a reflection of modern attitudes and the fact that rape can involve other gender combinations, said Law Society president Gregory Vijayendran. He added

that the reform reflects a “modern understanding” of the objective of rape law, which is to “protect sexual autonomy from the harm of non-consensual penetrative sex acts”.

Lawyer Terence Seah said the changes tackle the preconception that men can rape only women. “But this has changed in recent times.”

The existing Penal Code, enacted about 150 years ago, assumes that women are, for cultural and perhaps biological reasons, unlikely to commit certain sexual offences, said sociologist Tan Ern Ser. He added that there is also the assumption that sex is likely to occur only

between a man and woman. “However, it has since been recognised that there is a broader range of biological sex, gender and sexuality.”

But under the new provisions, the perpetrator of rape must have a penis which means women cannot be considered rapists. Instead, a woman will be charged under the revised provision for sexual assault, if she forcefully penetrates a person or forces the person, including a man, into having sex with her.

Both rape and sexual assault crimes carry the same maximum penalty of 20 years’ jail and caning or fine. “It’s a matter of terminology,

as women can still be taken to task for their crime just like a man can,” said law professor Kumaralingam Amirthalingam.

But psychiatrist Lim Boon Leng said: “The stigma and shame that victims of both genders feel still means there is under-reporting. So unless this changes, we might not see these cases come up.”

Under the proposed changes, it is also possible to insult a man’s modesty. The current law confines the offence to just women, but changes will expand it to “any person”.

However, some like Ms Joseph highlighted that the term “modesty” might no longer be the appropriate word. Aware had suggested using “sexual harassment”. But this was not taken up in the Bill.

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S’pore clarifies stance on cannabinoid products

The authorities have clarified Singapore’s position on the use of pharmaceutical cannabinoid products in the country, saying their presence comes under strict frameworks and regulations and does not diminish Singapore’s zero-tolerance position against drugs.

In a joint statement yesterday, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health said it was important to differentiate between products containing unprocessed or raw cannabis and pharmaceutical products containing cannabinoids.

“Our drug control policies are underpinned by evidence and research,” said the statement, adding

that Singapore must continue to stay drug-free to prevent harm to its population and society.

“Cannabis is clearly addictive and harmful, and there is no scientific evidence of the safety and efficacy of raw cannabis use,” it said.

“This supports our position that cannabis should remain an illicit drug. At the same time, we will continue to allow safe and controlled access to evidence-based medical treatment options.”

Cannabinoids are chemical compounds found in the cannabis plant. They can be medically administered through pharmaceutical products such as oral solutions and



A medical cannabis menu at a dispensary in New York. Cannabinoids are chemical compounds found in the cannabis plant and can be medically administered through pharmaceutical products such as oral solutions. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

sprays, said the authorities, acknowledging the potential therapeutic uses of cannabinoids. “There is some published research, derived from controlled clinical trials, on the potential therapeutic uses of

cannabinoids to manage seizures and epilepsy,” said the statement.

These cannabinoid pharmaceuticals undergo rigorous scientific review by the Health Sciences Authority before they can be registered for

supply here. Manufacturers also need to substantiate the safety, quality and efficacy of the cannabinoid pharmaceuticals based on scientific evidence from clinical studies and data on the manufacturing process.

But, to date, there have been no studies validating the claims of unprocessed or raw cannabis being able to treat medical conditions, said the authorities. They cited a 2015 literature review done by Institute of Mental Health experts which affirmed the harmful and addictive nature of unprocessed or raw cannabis.

“The team concluded that cannabis consumption is associated with irreversible brain damage, brain shrinkage, and serious mental or psychiatric illnesses,” said the statement. “The Singapore Government’s stand on illicit drugs, including cannabis, is clear – they are harmful, addictive and can destroy lives, families and communities.”

It said examples of other coun-

tries have clearly shown that a permissive attitude towards the use of drugs exacts a high cost on society. “Therefore, we have strict laws against the trafficking, possession, consumption, and import or export of illicit drugs, including cannabis and cannabis products.”

This comes against the backdrop of countries such as Thailand approving legislation on the use of cannabis for medical purposes last December. Other countries in the region have also reportedly started talks on similar legislation.

In the statement, the ministries said Singapore’s “comprehensive and sustained approach” to tackling both demand and supply of drugs has allowed the country to remain relatively drug-free. Last year, the number of drug abusers arrested in Singapore comprised less than 0.1 per cent of its population.

Tan Tam Mei

‘Surprise’ fees irk Deliveroo customers

Some upset they didn’t get e-mail or in-app notice; firm says fees completely transparent

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

Customers who placed an order on Deliveroo recently might have noticed a new fee or two during check-out.

About six months after it removed its minimum spend across most of the heartland neighbourhoods it services, Deliveroo has quietly re-introduced it in the form of a “small order fee”, which customers say can go up to \$5 for orders under \$10 and is applicable islandwide.

Deliveroo Plus subscribers, who pay a monthly fee for unlimited free delivery, have also begun to notice a small “service fee” applied to their orders, a number of them told The Straits Times.

Some customers of the food delivery service are upset that they did not receive any e-mail or in-app notice of the new fees, which they say took effect last month.

Researcher Allan Dong, who lives in Hougang, one of the neighbourhoods that had its minimum spend removed in August last year, said he first noticed a \$1 add-on fee to an order in mid-January.

A few days later when he ordered a dish of chicken glutinous rice for \$4.80, a \$5 “surcharge for orders under \$10” was listed at checkout.

On another occasion, a “service fee” of 36 cents was added to his order of \$16.30.

Mr Dong, 39, who uses food delivery services five times a week, showed ST a screenshot of his e-mail exchange with a Deliveroo customer service representative, who said that a minimum charge of \$10 now applies to all zones.

“This is a major change on our system and we are not able to inform every individual, individually,” the representative wrote.

Mr Dong, who has since cancelled his Deliveroo Plus subscription, said: “They can use e-mail to inform us to subscribe to their service, but they don’t bother to inform us about this major change?”

IT freelancer Nax Chua, 39, noted the Deliveroo app stores credit card details, making placing an order as simple as a few taps.

He said: “Some customers may

not even notice (the fees) and pay for the order.”

Ms Jane Tan, who works in a bank, said the unlimited free delivery service offered by Deliveroo Plus appealed to residents of neighbourhoods without the minimum order requirement, such as herself.

Last August, Deliveroo announced it was waiving the minimum spend for 19 neighbourhoods as well as orders in the Central Business District placed before 6pm.

Ms Tan, who lives in Choa Chu Kang, said she found a \$1 delivery

charge for an order last month, which was “odd since Deliveroo Plus members should not be charged with delivery fees”. Two weeks later, a \$5 small order fee was applied to another order, “which was bewildering”, said Ms Tan, 34.

Mr Siddharth Shanker, general manager for Deliveroo Singapore, said in response to queries that the “variable fees” are tied to the service’s expansion.

Deliveroo, which currently has about 6,000 riders and 4,500 restaurant partners here, plans to increase the pool by 2,000 riders and 5,000 restaurant partners by the end of the year.

Mr Shanker said that while Deliveroo’s fee structure is subject to



ST PHOTO: YEN MENG JIIN

change, the firm is completely transparent.

“Customers have full visibility to all pricings as they go through the app and check out their orders. There are also icons in the app ex-

plaining what each cost is,” he said.

To help cover its expansion in Singapore, Deliveroo has introduced a “small service fee” while orders which do not meet a certain value will incur a “small order fee”, said

FULL VISIBILITY

Customers have full visibility to all pricings as they go through the app and check out their orders. There are also icons in the app explaining what each cost is.



MR SIDDHARTH SHANKER (left), Deliveroo Singapore’s general manager, on the new fees the food delivery service has introduced for customers.

Mr Shanker, who did not say how much the fees are, when they were introduced and what constitutes a small order. Both fees apply to Deliveroo Plus customers as well.

Consumers Association of Singapore executive director Loy York Jui said that businesses have the right to set their own prices, including any additional fees, for their goods and services.

“However, it is important for businesses to be fair and transparent in their pricing. Any material change in prices or introduction of additional fees should be clearly communicated to their customers at the earliest possible instance,” he said.

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He will be joined by The Straits Times Senior Writer Lee Siew Hua.



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Rail reliability rising, but so are operating costs: Khaw

Operators' efforts to intensify maintenance regime have taken financial toll, says minister

Toh Ting Wei

The reliability of Singapore's MRT network has increased by more than three times since 2017, but this has taken a toll on the train operators, Minister for Transport Khaw Boon Wan said in Parliament yesterday.

The improvement was the result of rail operators SMRT Trains and SBS Transit intensifying their oper-

ating and maintenance regime.

But this has caused SMRT and SBS' Downtown Line (DTL) to chalk up operating costs that are significantly higher than their fare income in their respective financial years ending March 2018 and December 2017.

Mr Khaw, referring to the DTL's latest financial results unveiled on Tuesday, said: "We are combing through the results, and I believe Downtown Line continues to be in

a pretty bad shape."

Mr Khaw was replying to Nominated MP Walter Theseira, who asked about the amount of government grants and subsidies expected to be used to cover the operating costs of MRT lines.

When contacted, SBS Transit said the DTL's losses in 2018 were smaller than in the previous year.

"Meanwhile, the DTL continues to face challenges as the overall fare revenue generated is still not sufficient to cover its operating costs," added its senior vice-president for corporate communications, Ms Tammy Tan.

In Parliament, Dr Theseira also

asked Mr Khaw about the Government's plans should operators continue to suffer substantial operating losses. He pointed out that the fare formula, which is in place until 2022, does not account for the increased maintenance expenditure.

Mr Khaw said the issue will have to be addressed by the Public Transport Council, which determines fares for public transport.

He added: "What we have learnt in the last three years is reliability is an engineering problem. It can be fixed, but you need money, you need resources, you need time."

"The secondary question is how do you share the money... You are

talking about sharing between taxpayers – through government subsidies – and commuters, through some fare adjustments."

On the issue of government grants and subsidies for MRT lines, Mr Khaw said the Government has invested and subsidised heavily to ensure Singapore's rail network is "reliable, convenient and affordable".

It is spending about \$25 billion in the next five years to expand the MRT network, with the building of the Thomson-East Coast Line, Jurong Region Line and the Cross Island Line. About \$4.5 billion will also be spent in the next five years to build, replace and upgrade rail operating assets on the network, including trains and signalling systems.

"We will continue to work towards improving rail reliability, making our rail network among the most reliable in the world," said Mr Khaw. "We are, however, mindful that any decision to increase the level of government funding for rail operations has to be weighed against competing needs, such as healthcare and security."

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COMPETING NEEDS

We will continue to work towards improving rail reliability, making our rail network among the most reliable in the world. We are, however, mindful that any decision to increase the level of government funding for rail operations has to be weighed against competing needs, such as healthcare and security.



MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT
KHAW BOON WAN

Work ongoing to boost anti-terror measures for public transport

The possibility of a terrorist attack against Singapore's public transport facilities cannot be discounted, with the terrorism threat still pertinent.

Therefore, the authorities have been working to customise specific security measures for public transport based on the current threat level.

Work to increase security awareness and strengthen emergency preparedness in the community is also ongoing, Senior Minister of State for Transport Janil Puthucheary said in Parliament yesterday.

"Public transport facilities are attractive targets for terrorist elements due to their vulnerability and potential for mass casualties," said Dr Janil, noting that there have been attacks against commuters and subway trains globally in the last two years.

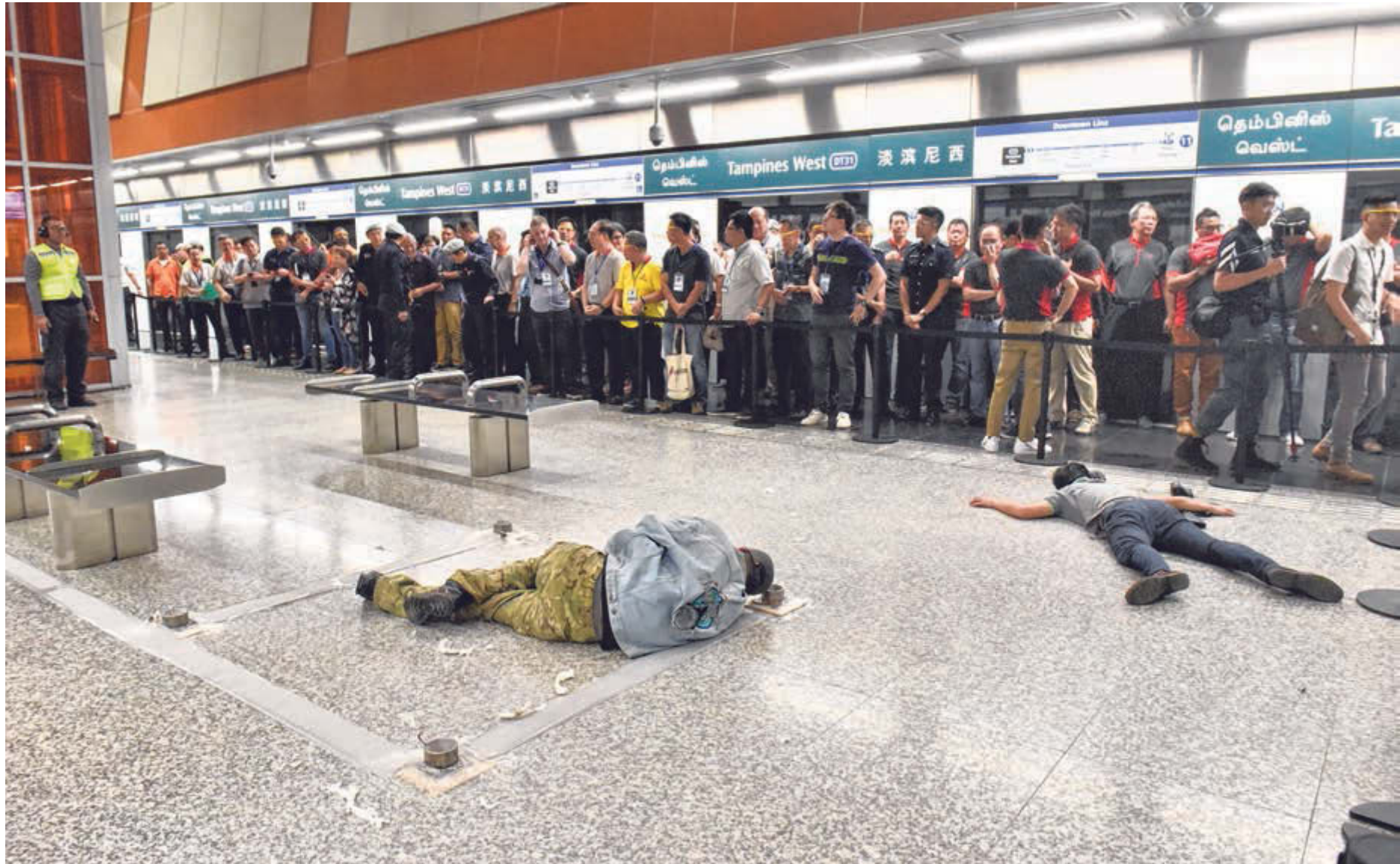
He was replying to questions by Mr Melvin Yong (Tanjong Pagar GRC).

Mr Yong had asked about the threat level for public transport facilities, in the light of the Terrorism Threat Assessment Report released last month. The report said the terrorism threat in Singapore remains high as more radicalised individuals here are uncovered and terror groups continue to make their presence felt globally.

Mr Yong asked if the Land Transport Authority (LTA) would consider increasing public education efforts to better prepare transport workers and commuters on what to do in case of a security incident in a public transport facility.

Dr Janil said LTA and public transport operators have been working closely with Home Team agencies.

An example of ongoing efforts was the simulated terrorist attack at Tampines West MRT station last



A simulated terrorist attack at Tampines West MRT station last month involved more than 120 officers from various agencies and public transport workers. Senior Minister of State for Transport Janil Puthucheary said in Parliament yesterday that LTA and public transport operators have been working closely with Home Team agencies. ST FILE PHOTO

month, which involved more than 120 officers from various agencies and public transport workers.

"Regular exercises are necessary, even though they may cause incon-

venience to commuters," said Dr Janil.

Other efforts include producing a video, posters and advisories that educate commuters and a quarterly

protective security awareness seminar for public transport workers.

"It is not just about public transport," he added.

"Actually, this is at the heart of

the larger SGSecure movement that the public transport community is trying to play its part in."

Toh Ting Wei

NAC had no inkling art fair would be cancelled: Grace Fu

Ong Sor Fern

The National Arts Council (NAC) "had no inkling" that contemporary art fair Art Stage Singapore would abruptly cancel its latest edition, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu said yesterday.

She said her ministry and NAC were "particularly disappointed" with the cancellation, as there was no indication that Art Stage had planned to do so on the occasions when it, together with the authorities, presented Singapore Art Week to the community and met the media.

Non-Constituency MP Leon Perera had asked about the cancellation, which was announced just eight days before the event and left participating art galleries stranded.

The contemporary art fair was the showpiece event of the annual public arts festival, Singapore Art Week.

Ms Fu added that Art Stage Singapore is a commercial organisation, and as the NAC did not have a direct financial interest in the show, "we do not have sight of its financial numbers".

On whether the Government



Non-profit group Arts Outreach contacted 36 galleries hit by Art Stage Singapore's cancellation, and 14 took part in the ARTery (above), a pop-up event at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre. ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

would consider an early warning system where commercial organisers would have to provide updates on their finances, Ms Fu said: "Obviously, like all commercial entities, financial situations are not something that you will openly display or openly demonstrate to the public."

"It will not be appropriate for us to be demanding financial, commercial organisations to show us their financial situation."

Art Stage Singapore, the company behind the fair, has been placed under provisional liquidation, said restructuring consultancy Acres Advisory on Tuesday.

The fair was backed by the NAC, Economic Development Board and Singapore Tourism Board. Its director Lorenzo Rudolf, a Swiss national, was credited with having turned the Swiss art fair Art Basel

into a vibrant, internationally renowned fair in the 1990s.

While the cancellation came as a shock, Ms Fu noted that the art community's reaction proved the scene's resilience.

With the NAC's support, non-profit group Arts Outreach contacted 36 galleries affected by the cancellation. Fourteen later took part in the ARTery, a pop-up event at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

Ms Fu said: "The art marketplace is not one where the regulator itself can decide its viability and its growth... We really call on the art community to come in and support Singapore Art Week and any subsequent events that we may have in Singapore."

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Rohingya refugee repatriation: Why Asean cannot impose deadline

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

The Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar need to have sufficient confidence before their repatriation can start "in a voluntary, safe and dignified way", said Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan in Parliament yesterday.

He made the point when explaining why it was not possible for Singapore or Asean to impose a deadline to start the process for repatriation.

But when it happens, Asean will stand ready to support the refugees, in providing or helping in the provision of healthcare and education facilities, and the promotion of interfaith dialogue, he added.

But the more difficult and fundamental issues in the Rohingya crisis involve such challenges as citizenship and political rights, said Dr Balakrishnan in response to Nominated MP Anthea Ong.

Again, these are issues that Asean cannot decide or debate on. "We cannot do so on behalf of Myanmar and, ultimately, Myanmar has to sort out its own political challenges," he told the House.

More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled a sweeping army crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine

state in 2017.

Many now live in cramped conditions in camps in Bangladesh.

Last October, Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed to repatriate hundreds of thousands of refugees. But the plan has been opposed by the Rohingya as well as the United Nations refugee agency and aid groups, all fearing for their safety.

The repatriation planned for last November also stalled amid protests at the refugee camps.

Dr Balakrishnan said that at the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting last month, the subject of the Rakhine state came up for extensive, informal discussions among the leaders.

"We focused on efforts by Asean to support the refugees as well as Myanmar and, in particular, focused on the safe and voluntary repatriation of these refugees," he noted.

"We welcomed the finalisation of the terms of reference of the needs assessment team that will be dispatched by the Asean Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance," he said.

Dr Balakrishnan said the team will help identify the areas through which Asean can provide support and also enhance the trust and confidence of the refugees.

But the deployment of the team had to be postponed, owing to the

recent outbreak of violence involving the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army, a militant group calling for greater autonomy for Rakhine state.

"It's important for the refugees ultimately to return home so that they can rebuild their lives, but I would emphasise it is just as important that the manner of the repatriation be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable."

"I have met the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and also the State Counsellor of Myanmar just two months ago and I am absolutely certain that the leadership of both countries is committed to the ultimate repatriation of the refugees," Dr Balakrishnan said, referring to Ms Sheikh Hasina and Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, respectively.

Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC) asked if the issue of citizenship for the refugees could be discussed by Asean at a deeper level.

Dr Balakrishnan replied: "Simple answer – no."

He added: "Citizenship is a fundamental political right. It goes to the heart of sovereignty. It goes to the heart of the construction of how a country looks at itself and identifies who is in and who is out... This is not something that foreigners should get involved in."

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AVA to review pet industry regulations

Agency will look at how best to regulate pet boarding businesses, says Sun Xueling

Felicia Choo

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) plans to do a comprehensive review of the regulations of the pet industry, including how best to regulate pet boarding businesses, said Senior Parliamentary Secretary for National Development Sun Xueling in Parliament yesterday.

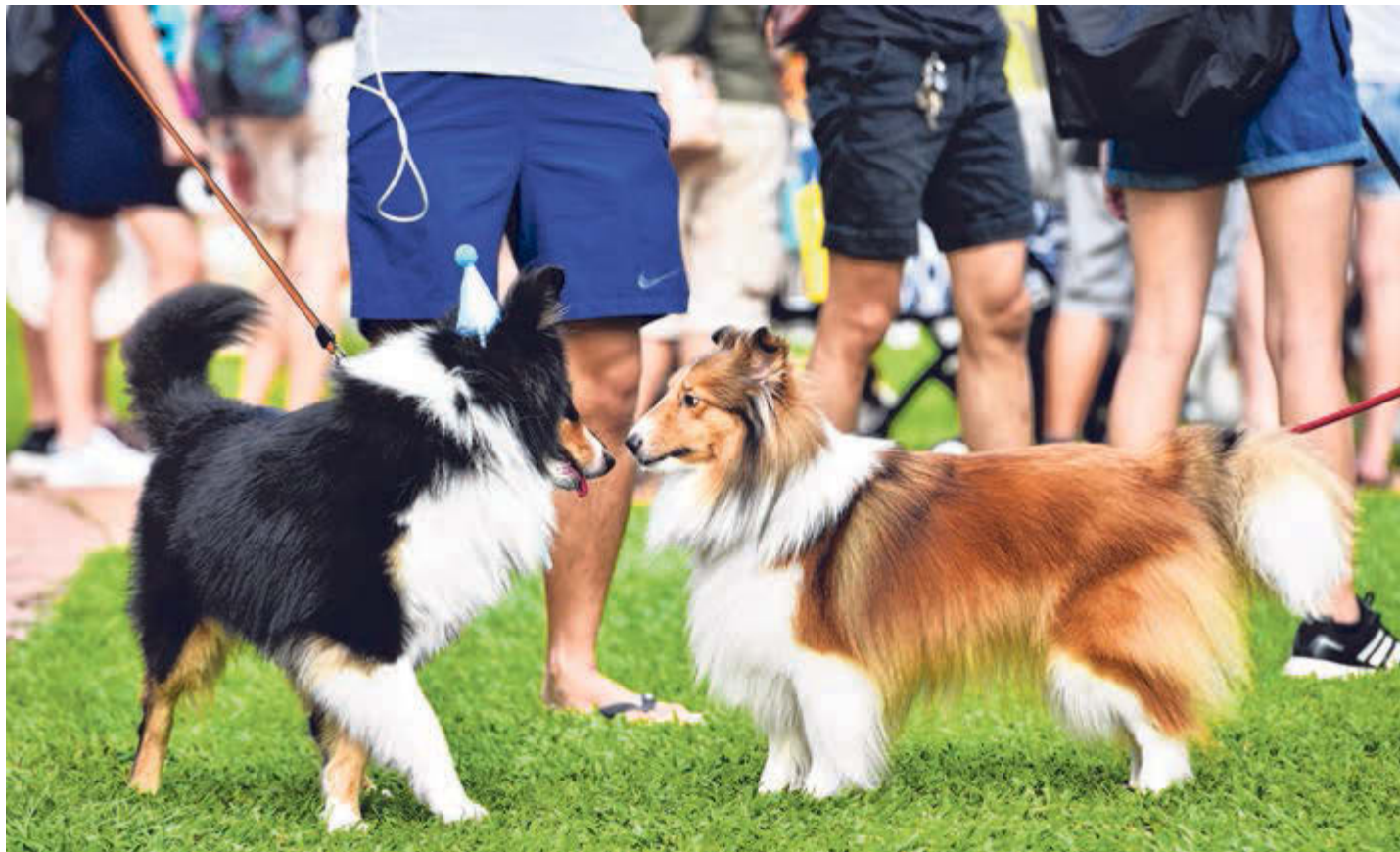
She noted that AVA currently licenses pet shops and pet farms, some of which have commercial pet boarding facilities.

She was replying to Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC) who had asked

whether the National Development Ministry will license such “pet hotels” on top of requiring them to abide by the standards and best practices listed in the Code of Animal Welfare (for the Pet Industry).

She noted that beyond the code, “AVA can take enforcement action against pet boarding businesses under the Animals and Birds Act for failing in this duty of care, or for animal cruelty”.

Pet boarding facilities were in the spotlight earlier this year when a dog from Platinum Dogs Club went missing while staying at the facility. Later, it was found to have died.



AVA currently licenses pet shops and pet farms, some of which have commercial pet boarding facilities. Pet boarding facilities were in the spotlight earlier this year when a dog from Platinum Dogs Club went missing while staying at the facility, and was later found to have died.
ST FILE PHOTO

Before an AVA investigation revealed that it had died, angry dog owners protested outside the facility in Bukit Panjang.

The facility had previously been criticised online by other dog owners for mistreatment of their pets.

Mr Ng, founder and chief executive of wildlife rescue group Animal Concerns Research and Education Society, asked if AVA has a list of pet boarders to do spot checks on, to prevent animal abuse while the review is being done.

Ms Sun said AVA has a list of commercial boarders in pet farms, and that pet boarders who operate outside of farmland do not need a licence.

But, she added: “We also need to be mindful that there are many pet boarders who are do-gooders – well-meaning pet lovers who provide pet boarding facilities.”

Mr Ng also raised the issue of shark’s fins, asking what proportion of shark’s fin shipments are sampled and undergo DNA analy-

sis to ensure the species declarations are accurate.

Ms Sun replied that “AVA acts based on credible information, tip-offs from other regulatory agencies and market surveillance to identify shark’s fin consignments that may not have the necessary Cites permits or may have been wrongly declared”.

These consignments then undergo DNA testing to verify if the species declarations are accurate, she added.

Cites, or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which Singapore is a party to, regulates such trades through a system of permits issued by both importing and exporting countries. Some shark species are on the Cites list.

Ms Sun said that in the past five years, the AVA found one consignment of shark’s fin to be wrongly declared.

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SGX cannot prevent sudden business failures: Ong Ye Kung

Sue-Ann Tan

Until its near-collapse last year, Singapore-listed Noble Group was one of Asia’s top commodity traders and had been given a clean bill of health by its auditors.

Yesterday, its sudden reversal of fortunes was cited in Parliament by Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, a board member of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), when he explained why the authorities cannot prevent companies from suddenly going under despite regulations.

Mr Ong said that the regulator, Singapore Exchange Regulation (SGX RegCo), essentially ensures transparency and accuracy of companies’ financial reports and will investigate when there is evidence of lapses.

Noble is being investigated for suspected false and misleading

statements and breaches of disclosure requirements.

The regulator, however, is not able to prevent business failure, he added, speaking on behalf of Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who is the minister in charge of the MAS.

“Our regulatory regime does not, and cannot, dictate how listed companies make their commercial decisions or seek to prevent business failures,” said Mr Ong.

“What regulation can do is to promote transparency and good disclosure practices so that investors are able to make informed decisions,” he said in his reply to Non-Constituency MP Leon Perera who had asked about the measures that are in place to reduce the risk of SGX-listed companies experiencing sudden financial declines.

Mr Ong also said the Noble case was “peculiar” as reputable auditors gave the company a clean bill



Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, who is on the MAS board, said SGX RegCo will investigate when there is evidence of lapses. Noble is being investigated for suspected false and misleading statements and breaches of disclosure requirements.
PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

of health. But once there was enough evidence of lapses, the authorities launched an overt investigation, he added.

Elaborating on SGX’s rules, he said listed companies are required to provide timely and accurate disclosure of all material information concerning their business, financial condition and prospects. This includes reporting financial results either quarterly or half-yearly, depending on their market capitalisation.

“Further, if the board sees clear ev-

idence of significant improvement or deterioration in the company’s near-term financial performance, it is obliged to make an immediate announcement,” he added.

If companies do not provide clear or adequate disclosures, SGX RegCo can engage the listed company directly or make a public query. In the financial year ending in June 2018, SGX RegCo issued more than 400 public queries.

For serious disclosure lapses, it will investigate and take enforcement action.

The regulator also has a Fast Track programme in which companies with a good history of compliance and corporate governance can get their company submissions processed more quickly. Those with poor compliance records are subject to increased scrutiny.

Said Mr Ong: “In general, regulators take investigations seriously, seek expert advice, and if there are wrongdoers, they will face the full force of the law.”

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Land prices for public housing lower than that for private

The average price of land paid for private housing developments bought through the Government Land Sales Programme between 2015 and 2018 was about \$7,000 per sq m, excluding the Core Central Region.

In the same period, the Housing Board paid an average of about \$2,000 per sq m for land for public housing in mature estates.

These figures were disclosed in Parliament yesterday by Minister for National Development Lawrence Wong, in his reply to Mr Faisal Manap (Aljunied GRC).

Mr Wong also said that state land is sold to the HDB at the market value assessed by the Chief Valuer. “The valuation is done in accordance with market conditions and established valuation principles.”

He added that land for public housing has a lower valuation compared with land zoned for private housing.

Sue-Ann Tan

Loss of personal data: Govt reported 41 cases to police in past 3 years

Hariz Baharudin

In the past three years, the Government has reported 41 cases of loss of personal data to the police, said Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean yesterday.

Four in five of these cases were re-

ported on the day the loss was discovered, he added.

DPM Teo said in a written reply to a parliamentary question that “loss of personal data by government agencies is reported to the police when there is suspected foul play, or when a physical asset such as a laptop is missing”.

These incidents are not reported to Singapore’s privacy watchdog, the Personal Data Protection Commission, as it is not its function to investigate government-related incidents, he added, replying on behalf of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Nominated MP Walter Theseira had also asked what proportion of

these cases were disclosed to the public and affected individuals.

Mr Teo said in seven of the 41 incidents, the individuals affected were notified. In another four, both the individuals and the public were told.

Of these 11 cases, it took an average of three weeks for the affected individuals to be notified.

“This was the time taken to identify the exact individuals affected, and assess the extent of loss, to give an accurate report of the situation to the affected individuals, and to recover or safeguard evidence for potential future prosecution,” he said.

The time needed depends on the incident’s complexity, he added.

The other 30 police reports were on the loss of physical assets and no individual’s data was compromised.

The lost laptops are protected by encryption, and will be immediately blocked from the government network, Mr Teo said.

“Nevertheless, a lost laptop remains a serious concern and the agency affected will work with the police to make a best effort to recover it,” he added.

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Sentencing guide 'likely needed' for PMD offences

High Court: Let cases be brought to courts before setting guidelines



K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

Cyclist Cai Mei Ying was sentenced to two weeks' jail by the State Courts after she knocked down and injured a 77-year-old woman in September 2016. The High Court has upheld the sentence on appeal.

The High Court has said a sentencing framework to deal with bicycle and personal mobility device (PMD) offenders knocking into pedestrian-victims is "likely to be needed" in due course.

As such situations require careful consideration of factors like sentencing imperatives, it is best to allow a number of cases to be brought before the courts and the relevant issues sieved through the adversarial process before setting such a structure, said Justice Aedit Abdullah.

"I would thus leave it for another day for the framework to be laid down," he added in decision grounds last week, dismissing an appeal involving such a case.

The judge indicated the courts are likely to take a stern view and impose jail sentences, which in future may be higher than the two weeks' jail term handed to Cai Mei Ying, which he upheld on appeal.

Cyclist Cai, 49, had knocked into a 77-year-old woman at a market compound in Bedok North in September 2016. The victim suffered a

hip fracture and required surgery.

"I think it is quite telling that the collision occurred in front of a 'No Bicycles' sign," said Justice Aedit.

Cai had pleaded guilty in the State Courts last year to causing grievous hurt by a negligent act that endangered the personal safety of others.

The court heard then that Cai, who operates a stall selling bean curd and noodles at the market, had regularly rode her bicycle to and from her workplace as well as in the market. She was sentenced to two weeks' jail and ordered to pay \$7,000 in compensation to the victim, Madam Ang Ah Soi.

Cai, defended by Senior Counsel Lok Vi Ming, appealed to the High Court against the sentence, while Deputy Public Prosecutor Christina Koh argued for the prosecution.

At issue was whether a jail term was justified for a cyclist who negligently knocked into a pedestrian and caused grievous hurt in a public space where cycling is banned.

Justice Aedit said he saw no reason to depart from the sentence imposed by the district judge as it was not "manifestly excessive".

The High Court had appointed lawyer Clarence Ding as young *amicus curiae* – friend of the court – in the case to help with considering a sentencing framework for offences under Section 338(B) of the Penal Code where grievous hurt is caused

by the negligent riding of bicycles and PMDs.

"I do note that it is likely that a sentencing framework would be needed for cases involving bicycle or PMD accidents on pavements with pedestrians as victims," said the judge. "Shared spaces, whether roads or pavements, require most of all consideration and courtesy between all users. I hope that it will not come to pass that we will need a sentencing framework for pavement collisions, but real life will probably prove otherwise."

He strongly urged cyclists and PMD users "to exercise such due care and consideration; where injuries do arise because of the fault of the rider, it is likely that the courts will take a stern view and impose custodial sentences".

The use of PMDs and bicycles on footpaths has become a public concern in recent times. Last month, the Land Transport Authority announced tighter rules as part of ongoing efforts "to foster greater rider responsibility and encourage safe sharing of our paths and roads". Among other measures, cyclists and PMD users will no longer be able to ride at speeds above 10kmh on footpaths from Feb 1 and such users will have to stop and look out for vehicles at road crossings.

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Jail for e-scooter rider who injured pedestrian

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A rider was using his electric scooter along a footpath in Bedok Reservoir Road when it hit a pedestrian who suffered brain injuries after she was flung to the ground.

Muhammad Sha'if Jumadi, 23, borrowed a passer-by's mobile phone to call for an ambulance, but gave a false number when an operator asked for his contact details. He then fled the scene before the ambulance arrived.

After the accident, Ms Goh Lay Yong, 45, had to stop working as an accountant. She now needs help with basic functions such as standing, walking and showering.

Sha'if was arrested at his flat a week after the accident and he was out on bail when he consumed methamphetamine or Ice.

He was sentenced to a jail term of eight months and seven weeks yesterday after pleading guilty to causing grievous hurt to Ms Goh by performing a rash act. He also admitted to one count each of Ice consumption and possession.

Noting the proliferation in the use of personal mobility devices (PMDs) such as e-scooters, District Judge Marvin Bay said a deterrent sentence has to be imposed to strongly discourage rash, inconsiderate or unsafe riding within shared public spaces.

He added: "A deterrent sentence would reinforce the essential message for powered mobility device users to maintain a high

level of situational awareness and be ever vigilant for the presence of other road users."

Deputy Public Prosecutor Deborah Lee said Sha'if was riding his e-scooter at a speed of about 22 to 25kmh at around 6pm on March 7 last year when he approached an overhead bridge near Block 151 Bedok Reservoir Road.

Ms Goh was walking down the bridge onto a footpath when the e-scooter collided into her as Sha'if was unable to stop in time. She was flung to the ground and momentarily lost consciousness.

Sha'if also fell off his PMD. He then borrowed a passer-by's mobile phone to call for an ambulance and left the scene.

Ms Goh underwent surgery at Changi General Hospital. She was warned for 20 days and given 187 days of medical leave.

DPP Lee said Sha'if had failed to surrender himself to the police despite knowing that they were looking for him. Officers arrested him on March 14 last year and he was charged in court two days later.

He was out on bail when he was arrested for drug-related activities on July 23 last year. Officers seized from him two sachets of a substance which was later found to contain at least 6.84g of Ice. Traces of the drug were also found in his urine sample.

Sha'if was offered bail of \$15,000 and was ordered to surrender himself at the State Courts on Feb 25 to begin serving his sentence.

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Muhammad Sha'if Jumadi was riding his e-scooter at a speed of about 22 to 25kmh when it collided into a pedestrian who suffered brain injuries after she was flung to the ground.



The Museum of Contemporary Arts in Loewen Road, also known as Moca@Loewen, shut its doors on Monday as its lease had expired and it was not successful in the latest tender, said co-owner Linda Ma. ST PHOTOS: JOSEPH CHUA



Museum of Contemporary Arts closes after 9 years

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

After nine years in Tanglin Village, the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Loewen Road, also known as Moca@Loewen, shut its doors on Monday for the last time.

Its lease had expired and it was not successful in the latest tender, co-owner Linda Ma told The Straits Times on Tuesday.

While the clock has run out on its search for a new space, Ms Ma said she holds out hope that an opportunity will present itself to open another contemporary arts museum.

According to the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) website, the tender for 27A, 30B and 30C Loewen

Road, which sits on a land area of 138,424 sq ft, was awarded to Aurum Land.

A spokesman for Aurum Land said its subsidiary Core Collective, a co-working space for fitness and wellness professionals, will be opening its second outlet on the premises around the middle of the year.

In a statement on Monday, the museum thanked the National Heritage Board and patrons of the arts for their support over the years.

During its time, it had exhibited the artworks of more than 6,000 local and overseas artists, and brought more than 40 art exhibitions to Singapore which featured internationally renowned artists, it said.

The self-funded museum, which

offered free admission, was the first museum specialising in contemporary art when it opened in 2009, Ms Ma said. It stayed afloat over the years through art sales at the museum and at galleries she runs here as well as in Beijing and Jakarta.

"Even through very bad situations, we managed to get through," said the 50-year-old.

When she won the tender to open the museum about a decade ago, Ms Ma had been running Linda Gallery up the road in Dempsey. The gallery went online only in 2016.

The museum spanned three buildings, which housed exhibition areas and a cafe, as well as an outdoor sculpture garden.

"It is a very beautiful place and we



were so blessed to spend nine years there. Our team is very sad to leave, but we cannot do anything," said Ms Ma.

After a months-long search for new premises, "we realised that it is very difficult to find such a big space without government support. But if we find a suitable site we are very happy to run it again", she said.

The museum's artworks, which number in the hundreds, have been spread across its galleries in Jakarta and Beijing as well as a temporary office in Henderson Road.

"We did a great deal for the arts scene, and it's sad that within a short while Art Stage and Moca have both disappeared. We've had offers to move our museum else-

where, but we want to continue in Singapore if possible because I still believe that it's the best place for art in the region," said Ms Ma.

The SLA announced plans to rejuvenate Tanglin Village last year with upgrading works to span 40ha across the Dempsey, Loewen and Minden clusters.

Three blocks in Dempsey Road were identified for the first phase of the rejuvenation plans and were returned to the SLA last year. They were leased to Como Lifestyle for the expansion of its upmarket dining and retail cluster, with three new concepts including a family club to open this year.

The SLA and Singapore Tourism Board told The Straits Times in November that plans to rejuvenate Tanglin Village and improve its infrastructure are being finalised and details will be announced when ready.

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Paedophile admits sexually assaulting eight-year-old boy

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

A paedophile, who sexually violated the eight-year-old son of a friend despite the valiant efforts of another

boy to protect the victim, pleaded guilty in the High Court yesterday.

The prosecution is seeking at least 12 years of preventive detention for Sanusi Ahmad, 57, a recalcitrant offender who has spent a large part of his life behind bars.

The current offences were committed less than a year after he was released from jail for molesting and threatening a 29-year-old woman with a knife in 2013 after she rejected his sexual advances.

The boy and his mother, a single parent who depended on social welfare, lived at a rental flat with another woman and her son, who was the same age as the victim.

Sanusi was a friend of the victim's mother and would occasionally visit the flat. One day in June 2016, he turned up unannounced, while the women were sleeping in the living room and the boys were playing in the bedroom.

The witness was absorbed in playing mobile games and did not pay attention to what Sanusi was doing in the bedroom until he heard the victim shouting "help me".

When he looked up, the witness saw Sanusi performing a sexual act on the victim.

Shocked, he told the man to stop his disgusting acts. But Sanusi stared at him menacingly and asked the witness to sit on the bed as well.

The witness tried to pull the victim away but was physically blocked by the man. He watched helplessly as Sanusi performed oral sex on the victim, who was begging the man to stop.

Sanusi asked the boys to touch him but they refused. He left after giving the witness \$10.

The sexual assault came to light some days later after the victim's mother noticed that Sanusi kept engineering opportunities to be close to her son, even though the boy seemed averse to him.

The victim revealed that Sanusi had touched him inappropriately.

According to a child psychiatrist's report, the victim was shy, spoke with a stutter and has learning difficulties.

Sanusi pleaded guilty to one charge of sexual penetration of a minor. Five other charges, including

two for showing a pornographic video to the two boys, were taken into consideration.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Yvonne Poon argued that Sanusi was a menace to society who should be taken out of circulation to protect the public. His list of offences included one where he was sentenced to seven years' preventive detention in 1996 for molesting two 10-year-old boys.

The court called for a report to assess if he was suitable for preventive detention. The case will be heard again on March 13.

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Man jailed for siphoning over \$2m from firms

Accountant used false payment vouchers to deceive company director into signing cheques from two firms

Shaffiq Alkhatib

An accountant used false payment vouchers to deceive his workplace superior into signing their companies' cheques before siphoning more than \$2 million from the two firms.

Yeo Yong Heng, 53, was sentenced to a jail term of three years and 11 months yesterday after he pleaded guilty last month to 250 charges, including cheating, criminal breach of trust and money laundering.

The court took 616 other charges into consideration during sentencing.

Before handing down the sentence yesterday, District Judge Shaiffudin Saruwan said there had been a "relationship of trust" between Yeo and his employers.

The judge also noted that the accused had "taken advantage of the companies' weak corporate governance".

Yeo worked for Steel Industries from 1996 to 2013 and Malaysia-based S.I. Stainless from 2011 to 2013. One of the directors of Steel Industries, Singaporean Ong Soon Liong, also ran S.I. Stainless, the court heard.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Stacey Anne Fernandez said Steel Industries had accounts with three banks, with Mr Ong as the sole authorised signatory.

Yeo was entrusted with cheque books from the three banks and his job included preparing cheques and payment vouchers as well as

collecting payments on behalf of Steel Industries.

But between Dec 29, 2006 and June 22, 2013, he duped Mr Ong into issuing cheques from Steel Industries for purported company-related expenses and advances made by the firm to other parties.

He supported his deception by showing false payment vouchers.

DPP Fernandez said: "Yeo thus deceived Ong into believing that the amounts stated in the cheques were for legitimate expenses incurred by and advances to be made by Steel Industries.

"Yeo thereby dishonestly induced Ong to authorise payments of the amounts indicated in the cheques, and to deliver these signed cheques to Yeo."

The accused used the same ruse on S.I. Stainless as well.

In 2013, the police's Commercial Affairs Department launched an investigation after receiving a report on suspicious transactions linked to Yeo's bank, stating that at least 26 cheques issued by Steel Industries for more than \$300,000 in total had been deposited into his accounts between October 2012 and March that year.

The court heard that Yeo had used the monies to buy shares, a Toyota Wish car as well as two apartments - one in Amber Road and another in Jalan Dusun near Balestier Road.

He has since made full restitution after selling the two properties.

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Yeo Yong Heng was yesterday sentenced to a jail term of three years and 11 months over 250 charges, including cheating. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW

In 2013, the police's Commercial Affairs Department launched an investigation after receiving a report on suspicious transactions linked to Yeo Yong Heng's bank, stating that at least 26 cheques issued by Steel Industries for more than \$300,000 in total had been deposited into his accounts.

Four fined over illegal chauffeured services: LTA

Choo Yun Ting

Four drivers have been fined for providing illegal chauffeured services using vehicles from Malaysia. Three of the cars have also been forfeited.

According to a Land Transport Authority (LTA) statement yesterday, each driver was convicted of using an unlicensed public service vehicle, and driving a vehicle without valid insurance. They were each fined \$1,400 and disqualified from driving all classes of vehicles for 12 months.

LTA said three of the four vehicles used were forfeited, while the decision over the fourth vehicle is still pending.

In all the cases, investigations revealed that the drivers had ferried passengers from Singapore to Johor Baru on an agreed fare.

Last year, LTA caught 13 drivers using unlicensed foreign-registered vehicles to provide chauffeured services. Enforcement operations were conducted at visitor hot spots such as Changi Airport, HarbourFront Centre and East Coast Seafood Centre, the authority said.

LTA urged members of the public against engaging chauffeured services provided by persons using unlicensed vehicles, as these vehicles might not be sufficiently insured. Passengers may not be covered if they are involved in a traffic accident while travelling in such vehicles, the authority added.

LTA group director of traffic and road operations Chandrasekar Palanisamy said: "Our enforcement officers have cracked down on these unlicensed public service vehicles to protect our commuters and our drivers.

"We work closely with various agencies to obtain information and investigate these incidents. LTA views these infringements seriously, and we are committed to taking severe action against offenders."

Under the Road Traffic Act, all vehicles, including foreign-registered ones, are not allowed to provide taxi or chauffeured services in Singapore without a valid Public Service Vehicle Licence.

Any person caught using a vehicle that is not issued with the licence to provide taxi or chauffeured services shall be prosecuted, LTA said.

Those convicted face a fine of up to \$3,000, or a jail term not exceeding six months, or both. The vehicle used may also be forfeited.

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Last year's event drew crowds keen on finding out the latest food trends. PHOTO: SPHERE EXHIBITS

Healthy and natural

Superfood Asia 2019 will be stacked with the latest in healthy and halal food trends

For those who want an insight into new food trends that are healthy, natural and halal, head down to Superfood Asia this April.

The first exhibition of its kind in Asia, Superfood Asia will feature some of the fastest-growing segments in the food and beverage sector as well as bring some of the region's top manufacturers and producers together under one roof.

Say hello to superfoods

Public interest in superfoods has been rising exponentially in recent years, and Superfood Asia 2019 will be hosting top superfood brands from around the region. With consumers these days becoming more concerned about the nutritional value of the food they eat, there is a growing demand for nuts, fruits, seeds and other wholesome food products.

Fermented foods like yoghurt, kombucha, kimchi and miso are also gaining popularity

due to their nutritional benefits. "Exotic" plants such as goji berries, chia seeds and even moringa are now also considered superfoods.

Learn about new trends

For the first time at Superfood Asia, visitors can attend the Superfood Asia 2019 Conference. It is the only dedicated conference of its kind where speakers shed light on nutrients-rich food key to good health and your well-being.

Those attending the conference will be able to receive valuable information on topics like plant-based alternatives, food innovation, the use of technology in the food and beverage sector and Asian women in the industry.

Superfood Asia will also be hosting live demonstrations, international group pavilions and new launches. This year's exhibition will feature 200 exhibiting companies and 8000 trade visitors.

SUPERFOOD ASIA 2019

When: April 24 to 26

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Admission: Free

Info: <https://superfood-asia.com/>



Have rice, will eat

PaddyKing, at Booth D07 of Food & Beverage Fair 2019*, has just rolled out a new healthy wholegrain rice variety. Cultivated in north-east Thailand, the Thai Riceberry is an unpolished dark purplish bran that is said to be a good source of vitamin B, minerals, antioxidants and fibre.

The grains are easy to cook as they require no soaking: For every cup of rice, simply add two cups of water and cook it in the rice cooker. The cooked rice is soft with a mild fragrance you usually find in black glutinous rice.



Golden delicacies

Golden Moments, at Booth K25A of Food & Beverage Fair 2019*, has something in store for durian-lovers — the Golden QQ chewy balls.

The balls are made from the creamy flesh of Mao Shan Wang durians and carefully wrapped in a coating of bamboo charcoal. They are then dusted with 24K gold powder to give the chewy balls extra glitter.

These treats offer durian lovers a convenient and fuss-free option compared to the thorny king of fruits.

*Food & Beverage Fair 2019 will take place from March 21 to 24 at Singapore Expo Hall 5, 11 am to 10 pm daily. Admission is free. Call 6747-4620 for enquiries.

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Expensive lesson for Hyflux investors

The requirement for creditors to file proofs of claim by Feb 15 clearly brought more frustration to the tens of thousands of Hyflux investors during the festive period (Company Briefs, Feb 2).

It further served as a grim reminder of the credit risks of investing in myriads of complex and confusing instruments, including the more recent popular Singapore dollar corporate perpetual bonds that had propelled the bond market's impressive growth (What is credit

risk in bonds?, Feb 10).

The article on credit risks highlighted a few salient points. The complexity of such corporate financial instruments present inherent risks, which are easy for ordinary and even savvy investors to overlook as they are not easily apparent.

Dr Zhang Weina and Associate Professor Ruth Tan rightly suggested that using credit ratings by third-party international rating agencies will provide the important stamp of assurance and

confidence to guide investors. Specifically with Hyflux, this begs the question of whether requiring its bonds to be rated will spare the pain faced by yield-hungry investors, who rushed in to buy the bonds on the lure of attractive interest rates.

While there are concerns over chief executive Olivia Lum's remuneration even as the firm was racking up debt and losses, could oversight by regulators and requirement for all bond offerings to be rated have contained

Hyflux's implosion?

Will Singapore's reputation as a regulated and sound investment stronghold for safe and managed risk-taking enterprises suffer from a Hyflux blowout?

It is an expensive lesson for Hyflux investors, which hopefully will lead to stepped-up investor education and mandatory requirements to rate Singapore bonds for better transparency and investor protection.

Wee Kwee Keng

Probe Hyflux's past operations

Despite the two town hall meetings with stakeholders facilitated by the Securities Investors Association (Singapore) recently, many relevant questions regarding Hyflux's past operations and financial performance were

not answered satisfactorily.

Hence, it is heartening to read that Sias has followed up with a letter and a list of questions to Hyflux's board of directors (Hyflux queried over CEO's remuneration, Feb 11).

Many mom-and-pop investors have poured their money and life savings into perpetual securities after being enamoured with Hyflux's earlier performance and public pronouncements.

In the light of the many unanswered questions, the relevant authorities should initiate an investigation into Hyflux's past operations and financial performance.

In addition, the restructuring process should not be allowed to proceed till the investigations are completed.

Vincent Khoo

Re-examine case of doctor who was fined

I echo Dr Benny Loo's call for the Singapore Medical Council to respond in depth to the recent case of the \$100,000 fine imposed on Dr Lim Lian Arn (Help young doctors by clearing up ambiguity, Feb 11).

Without more dialogue, I fear the inevitable invasion of costly defensive medical practices.

In the long run, it is the public and the nation that will bear the brunt of this.

I am also glad that Senior Minister of State for Health Lam Pin Min responded to the matter in Parliament (No need to list all side effects: Lam Pin Min, Feb 12).

I do feel that the fine of \$100,000 is extremely harsh and unfair.

However, I am disappointed that Dr Lam said there is no need to reopen the case as both parties have accepted the judgment.

The authorities must not shy away from re-examining the issue, especially as many people have brought up their doubts on the matter.

We cannot allow this matter to rest, just because both parties have accepted the judgment.

I hope that our MPs will continue to ask for reviews of this matter; not so as to assign blame but, rather, to assure younger doctors and the public that we are committed to not escalating healthcare costs.

Tan Lai Yong (Dr)

Hefty fine needs to be rectified

Doctors are gratified that the efficient and fluid practice of medicine is made possible again after Senior Minister of State for Health Lam Pin Min made clarifications in Parliament (No need to list all side effects: Lam Pin Min, Feb 12).

Of course, this clarification notwithstanding, the ethical, competent and compassionate practice of medicine in Singapore will still be the order of the day and

patients can rest assured.

Still, the case of the orthopaedic surgeon fined \$100,000 for a minor lapse leaves residual disquiet among many in the medical profession and the final resolution seems incomplete.

That officialdom, the press and the public have actually come out rationally and sympathetically on the side of doctors clearly indicates that some injustice has, in this case, been perpetuated by the Singapore Medical Council's (SMC) disciplinary tribunal.

Straightforwardly accepting the punishment the way it is without

reopening the case for reconsideration because "both parties have accepted the judgment" is wrong and simply expedient.

Appropriate justice must never be dispensed in a slipshod manner and, in this case, can and should be implemented retroactively.

SMC judgments and punishments are always based on precedents when they are there for guidance.

As such, this case should not be left in the annals of our medical history without rectification of the quantitative outcome.

Yik Keng Yeong (Dr)

WRITE IN: Letters should be meant for exclusive publication in The Straits Times. They should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone numbers. The Forum editor reserves the right to edit the letters. For women, please indicate Miss, Ms, Mrs or Madam. Please e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg. Readers can also respond to letters via Facebook and Twitter.

Bouquets

Kudos to Binjai Brew creators

Congratulations to the creators of Binjai Brew – after being told to stop brewing in Nanyang Technological University, they have been through many challenges to return Binjai Brew back to Singapore permanently and properly this time.

Their story embodies the spirit of the entrepreneur.

Three young men with practically no business experience managed to, in their own words, make their "story go viral and spark a conversation on entrepreneurship in Parliament".

I laud Mr Rahul Immandira, Mr Abilash Subbaraman and Mr Heetesh Alwani for persevering in their journey to bring Binjai Brew back through legal means.

They have true entrepreneurial spirit, being prepared to refine their brewing recipes and learn how to expand the business by outsourcing the brewing

and packaging to a contract brewery.

Leroy Cheong Kai Thong

MAS' accolade reassuring

Well done, Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) on being named the central bank of the year by London-based journal Central Banking (MAS named central bank of the year, Feb 7).

It is comforting to receive confirmation that the MAS is indeed the competent central bank that we believe it to be.

This accolade comes at a perilous time, when the international banking and financial system is being used by powerful countries for political, instead of commercial, purposes.

The recent Bank of England's refusal to return Venezuela's gold worth about US\$1.2 billion (S\$1.6 billion) is shocking.

On this note, perhaps Singapore could promote itself as a safe haven for other countries to deposit their gold reserves.

Soh Gim Chuan

FORUM ONLINE

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SPEAKER: Professor Joseph Chinyong Liow, whose PhD is from the London School of Economics, is Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore), and Professor of Comparative and International Politics, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. He held the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC. Professor Liow's research interests encompass Muslim politics and social movements in Southeast Asia and the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Asia-Pacific region. He is the author, co-author, and editor of 14 books. A regular columnist for *The Straits Times*, his commentaries on international affairs have also appeared in *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *National Interest*, *Nikkei Asian Review*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. He has testified to the United States Congress, briefed to the ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting, and also consulted for a wide range of MNCs.

DETAILS:

Date: 22 February, Friday
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School of Humanities and School of Social Sciences,
Nanyang Technological University,
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Free shuttle bus services will be provided from Jurong East MRT Station. Participants can also take public bus 179 to the lecture venue. Details will be sent to registered participants via email closer to the event date.

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Felix Cheong has published 13 books across different genres, from poetry to short stories. A recipient of the Young Artist award, he has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years. He holds a master's degree in creative writing and currently teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University.



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A dramatic night photograph of a city skyline. A massive, bright lightning bolt strikes across the dark sky, illuminating the scene. Below the lightning, a dense cluster of high-rise buildings is visible, their windows glowing with warm yellow light. The foreground is dominated by dark, silhouetted trees and foliage, with some streetlights and building lights visible in the lower right corner. The overall atmosphere is one of intense power and urban energy.

Lightning flashing across the night sky in November 2013, during a thunderstorm at the junction of Chai Chee Road and New Upper Changi Road. The heavy rain left Singapore with flash floods.

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Journalist
The Straits Times



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CBD Grade A office rental growth highest since 2010

Annual growth for 2018 at 14.9% amid tight vacancies and strong demand as rents set to keep rising

Derek Wong

Grade A offices in the Central Business District (CBD) posted the highest annual rental growth since 2010 due to tightening vacancies, according to real estate services firm Colliers International.

The annual growth for last year was 14.9 per cent, compared with 22 per cent in 2010 after the global financial crisis, said Colliers in a statement yesterday.

CBD Grade A office rental growth was 2.3 per cent in 2017.

Demand is expected to remain strong, especially amid the continued expansion of the technology sector and flexible workspaces.

The Shenton Way/Tanjong Pagar

and Beach Road markets saw the largest rental increases last year, due to new developments such as Guoco Tower near Maxwell Road and Duo near Bugis MRT station.

In the fourth quarter of last year, average CBD Grade A rent in Beach Road rose 18.6 per cent year on year to \$8.52 per sq ft per month (psf pm), while rent in Shenton Way/Tanjong Pagar increased 18.4 per cent year on year to \$9.53 psf pm.

This is against the backdrop of an overall rise in prime office rents.

Figures from the Urban Redevelopment Authority last month showed prime office rents turning in a robust performance for last year, after a lacklustre 2017.

Central region rents rose by 7.4 per cent last year, compared with 0.4 per cent in the preceding 12 months.

The upward trend is expected to continue, said Ms Tricia Song, head of research for Singapore at Colliers.

"In view of tight vacancy and a

mutated supply pipeline, we expect the steady upward rental trend to persist over the next two years," she said.

She is predicting average rents to rise 8 per cent year on year this year, and a further 5 per cent year on year next year.

"The supply shortfall over 2019 to 2021 should keep CBD Grade A vacancy tight, below the 10-year average of 6.2 per cent," said Ms Song, adding that this was after accounting for the impact of slowing net absorption in 2020 and 2021 due to forecasts of slowing economic growth.

Net absorption measures the amount of new space leased by tenants minus the space vacated, and reflects the property market's momentum.

Colliers is expecting new CBD Grade A supply from 2019 to 2021 to average 614,000 sq ft per annum, which is about 2 per cent of stock per annum.

In contrast, new supply was

Mr Duncan White, head of office services at Colliers International, said occupiers should review their portfolios early amid the limited stock, as well as consider strategies that combine traditional office leases with short-term lease tenures within flexible workspace offerings.

about 10 per cent of stock in 2017.

The next major jump in supply, about 8 per cent in stock, is expected in 2022.

Mr Duncan White, head of office services at Colliers International, said occupiers should review their portfolios early amid the limited stock, as well as consider strategies that combine traditional office leases with short-term lease tenures within flexible workspace offerings.

He added: "Meanwhile, office landlords could be more proactive in engaging occupiers and be more progressive with varied lease structures to retain and attract tenants."

Colliers is also expecting more investor interest in the commercial sector on the back of the additional buyer's stamp duty hike on residential properties last July.

Mr Jerome Wright, director of capital markets and investment services at Colliers International, said: "We expect capital values to trail the projected rent growth and hence yields to remain largely stable over 2019 to 2021."

"This is mainly due to the hefty weight of global capital directed towards gateway cities. Moreover, the Singapore office market offers favourable fundamentals, given the impending supply shortfall over 2019 to 2021."

In the fourth quarter of last year, the capital values of CBD Grade A office properties rose 7.9 per cent year on year.

wderek@sph.com.sg



ComfortDelGro's local taxi fleet shrank by 6.7 per cent to 12,360 as at end-December. At the operating level, its taxi business (including overseas) posted a 3.4 per cent drop in profit to \$129.4 million. Its chief executive Yang Ban Seng said the drop in taxi earnings came more from China. In Singapore, Mr Yang said the group had scrapped "a lot of unhired cabs... and replaced those bought with high COEs". The replacement vehicles are hybrids, saving the group in diesel tax. ST FILE PHOTO

ComfortDelGro posts 0.6% rise in profit to \$303m

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport
Correspondent

Transport giant ComfortDelGro Corp posted a modest 0.6 per cent rise in net earnings to \$303.3 million for the year ended Dec 31 as weaker taxi and automotive engineering performances offset a strong public transit segment.

The absence of a special dividend from Australian unit Cabcharge and a drop in investment income also weighed on its bottom line.

The Singapore-based global group reported a 6.4 per cent rise in revenue to \$3.81 billion, with contributions from new acquisitions making up more than half of the increase.

These acquisitions contributed to a \$20.7 million growth in operating profit, while existing businesses contributed \$10.7 million.

Group operating expenses rose by 6.3 per cent to \$3.37 billion, with

the biggest jumps in fuel and energy costs, as well as staff cost.

Earnings per share rose from 13.95 cents in 2017 to 14.01 cents last year. Net tangible asset value per share stood at 120.7 cents, down from 121.01 cents. Margin before tax and depreciation narrowed from 22.9 per cent to 21.9 per cent.

ComfortDelGro chief executive Yang Ban Seng said: "2018 was a watershed year for the group, marked by our most aggressive expansion programme yet. We invested \$439.4 million overseas alone - the bulk of which was in Australia. Our M&A activities have started to bear fruit, giving a much needed boost to our existing businesses."

In response to queries at its results briefing yesterday, Mr Yang said the drop in taxi earnings came more from China. In Singapore, he said the group had scrapped "a lot of unhired cabs... and replaced those bought with high COEs".

The replacement vehicles are hybrids, saving the group in diesel

tax. They also fetch a higher rental of around \$117 per day, as compared with around \$98 for the diesel-powered Hyundai Sonata.

Its local taxi fleet shrank by 6.7 per cent to 12,360 as at end-December. ComfortDelGro said around 2,000 of these are hybrids, adding that all future replacements will be either hybrids or pure electric cars.

At the operating level, ComfortDelGro's taxi business (including overseas) posted a 3.4 per cent drop in profit to \$129.4 million. Automotive engineering (which includes fuel sale to cabbies) posted a 25.4 per cent drop to \$25.3 million.

Its public transport businesses chalked up a 20.2 per cent rise in operating profit to \$216.5 million, while its inspection and testing unit reported a 22.1 per cent increase to \$39.8 million.

Revenue contributions from overseas businesses remained largely unchanged at 41.1 per cent, while profit contributions shrank from 40.4 per cent to 35.6 per cent.

Directors have recommended a final dividend of 6.15 cents, up from 6.05 cents previously. Looking ahead, they expect its public transport businesses in Singapore and Australia to increase in revenue this year, while that of its UK unit will "maintain" current levels.

The company also expects all other units to maintain their revenue contributions, including taxis, signalling that the worst may be over from a segment battered by the flood of private-hire players.

The only exception was car rental and leasing, which the group said would see a drop in revenue this year.

Mr Yang said: "We will continue to look at investment opportunities and new technological initiatives which will further strengthen our foundation for growth."

ComfortDelGro's stock price ended five cents higher at \$2.38 yesterday.

christan@sph.com.sg

No need for global search for SBS Transit CEO

Transport operator SBS Transit will not embark on a global search to find a new chief executive officer, says its chairman Lim Jit Poh.

Responding to a query from The Straits Times yesterday, Mr Lim, who is also chairman of SBST's parent ComfortDelGro, said: "SBS Transit is a local company, we don't need to go on a global search."

The bus and rail operator's previous CEO Gan Juay Kiat quit in December over a "personal indiscretion". ComfortDelGro chief executive Yang Ban Seng has since been appointed to helm the subsidiary while the group identifies and grooms a new CEO.

In the past six months, two other transport operators saw new men at the helm.

In August, former chief of defence force Neo Kian Hong replaced Mr Desmond Kuek - also a former chief of defence force - to helm rail operator SMRT.

SMRT said Mr Neo was picked after a global search.

Last month, Tower Transit Singapore picked former brigadier-general Winston Toh to be its new managing director, replacing Mr Andrew Bujtor who left the bus operator in September.

Asked if the eventual SBS Transit CEO might also come from the military, Mr Lim did not rule out the possibility outright. "Look at it this way, a large pool of scholars are from Mindef. Some of them will join private businesses, and if they like it, they stay," he said.

Christopher Tan



A driverless vehicle being tested at Nanyang Technological University amid Singapore's push to be a smart nation. PHOTO: SHIN MIN

Autonomous Vehicles Readiness Index: S'pore in top spots

Republic is top in world for policy and public acceptance, and second in infrastructure

Singapore is second in the world and top in Asia in terms of its readiness to adopt autonomous vehicles on the strength of its government, infrastructure and consumer acceptance, according to a report by KPMG International.

The Netherlands topped the consulting firm's Autonomous Vehicles Readiness Index, which ranked 25 countries on four criteria – policy and legislation, technology and innovation, infrastructure, and consumer acceptance.

Singapore was the top-ranking country in terms of policy and consumer acceptance, and second in infrastructure.

That placement reflected the Singapore Government's efforts to position the country as a centre for autonomous vehicles, including the 2017 launch of the Centre of Excellence for Testing and Research of Autonomous Vehicles at Nanyang Technological University as a test town for driverless vehicles.

Singapore also scored for earmarking Punggol, Tengah and the Jurong Innovation District as test areas for driverless buses and shuttles for off-peak and on-demand commuting from 2022.

However, the country ranked relatively low – 15th out of the 25 countries – in terms of technology and innovation.

Said Mr Satya Ramamurthy, partner and head of infrastructure, government and healthcare at KPMG in Singapore: "The ecosystem for autonomous vehicles in Singapore is ready and very much aligned with how Singapore is establishing itself as a smart nation and centre for autonomous vehicle development."

He highlighted Singapore's heavy tax rate on cars, which could provide policymakers with a tool to drive adoption of autonomous vehicles.

The Government has also begun to develop a governance framework for artificial intelligence.

"The combination of these factors suggest that Singapore could eventually outpace other countries by 2020 if it continues to focus on technology and innovation to attract autonomous vehicle-related firms as well as build out its autonomous vehicle-related infrastructure," Mr Ramamurthy said.

Other top-performing countries on the index included Norway, the United States, Sweden, Finland, Britain, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Japan.

READY ECOSYSTEM

The ecosystem for autonomous vehicles in Singapore is ready and very much aligned with how Singapore is establishing itself as a smart nation and centre for autonomous vehicle development.



MR SATYA RAMAMURTHY, partner and head of infrastructure, government and healthcare at KPMG in Singapore.

Standard Chartered celebrates 160th year in Singapore



It's double happiness for Standard Chartered as the bank ushered in the Year of the Pig and marked its 160th anniversary in Singapore yesterday. At the event was guest of honour Indranee Rajah (centre), Minister in Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and Education, flanked by Mr Patrick Lee, chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Bank, Singapore, and Ms Judy Hsu, regional CEO, Asean and South Asia. Some 550 clients, partners and employees attended the dinner at the Ritz-Carlton Millenia Singapore. Mr Lee noted that the bank started its first branch here in 1859, saying: "As one of the oldest banks, we are proud to have played a part in Singapore's transformation into the world-class financial and commercial hub it is today." PHOTO: STANDARD CHARTERED

Airbus decision on axing biggest airliner looms

PARIS • Airbus is nearing a decision to axe production of the world's largest airliner and may give an update with full-year earnings today, industry sources and analysts said.

The fate of the A-380 superjumbo has been in doubt since a vital order from Emirates foundered over inconclusive engine talks, forcing Airbus and the airline to weigh an alternative plan that would trigger a premature halt to A-380 production.

Under the proposed reshuffle,

first reported by Reuters, Airbus hopes to broker a deal that would see Emirates switch part of its order to smaller models like the A-350 or A-330, while eking out a few last-minute A-380 orders from British Airways.

The timing of any final announcement may be driven by the outcome of those talks, but Airbus will be under pressure to provide some clarity on its plans in time for today's earnings announcement,

following mounting speculation over the plane's future.

"The A-380 is the elephant in the hangar; it will be impossible to avoid saying something on the subject," said Agency Partners analyst Sash Tusa, who predicted last week that a decision to shut the loss-making programme may be imminent.

The A-380 is already on life support due to weak sales. Barring a surprise breakthrough in stalled engine talks between Emirates and Rolls-

Royce, the A-380's French and German factories are unlikely to survive beyond 2020, analysts said.

Any decision to pull the plug on the iconic European double-decker after just 12 years in service must be approved by the Airbus board, which was set to meet yesterday.

Airbus declined to comment ahead of the earnings announcement. REUTERS

SEE OPINION A24



The Alibaba booth at an electronics show last month. Vice-chairman Joseph Tsai said the company's growth will continue to outpace the Chinese economy as digital commerce expands faster than the traditional retail business. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Alibaba says largely unscathed by China slowdown

SAN FRANCISCO • Alibaba Group Holding vice-chairman Joseph Tsai said the e-commerce giant has experienced limited impact from China's broader economic slowdown, as more and more business moves to the Internet.

The business is delinked from the Chinese economy because "we're in e-commerce and we're digitising the whole sector", Mr Tsai said on Tuesday at the Goldman Sachs Group technology conference.

Mr Tsai said the company's

growth would continue to outpace the broader economy as digital commerce expands faster than the traditional retail business.

China's economy expanded 6.4 per cent in the last three months of 2018 from a year earlier.

Alibaba is entering lucrative new spheres such as cloud services and entertainment, while helping to modernise physical retailers.

Alibaba's revenue rose 41 per cent to 117.3 billion yuan (\$\$23.5 billion), though that was the slowest pace in more than two years.

While the Chinese economic deceleration is depressing the consumer demand it relies on, the company has been spearheading a drive into lucrative new spheres such as cloud services and entertainment, while helping to modernise physical retailers.

Mr Tsai compared Alibaba's situation with Amazon's ability to achieve consistent double-digit sales growth while US economic expansion is projected to slow to about 2.5 per cent this year.

He also praised China's decision to reduce the tax burden for small and micro-sized companies by 200 billion yuan per year for the next three years, to boost those businesses amid the downturn.

"In prior cycles, the Chinese government would use monetary policy to pump a lot of liquidity into the system," Mr Tsai said.

Now, the government needs to use fiscal policy, that is, by reducing taxes, he added. "These SMEs, with more money in their pockets, will be growing their businesses." BLOOMBERG

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Farmers the big winners in China's Silicon Valley

Shenzhen Stock Exchange's agriculture index rallies as pig rearsers, chicken breeders do well

HONG KONG • The big stock-market winners in China's technology hub of Shenzhen are not artificial intelligence and semiconductor companies. They're farmers.

Chicken breeders Shandong Xiantan and Shandong Minhe Animal Husbandry have climbed around 40 per cent this year to Tuesday, while pig farmer Muyuan Foodstuff is up 34 per cent.

The Shenzhen Stock Exchange's agriculture index has rallied more than any other sub-gauge this year, and is the only one to eke out a gain in the past three years as the city's benchmark slid 22 per cent.

Analysts attribute the more recent gains to the likelihood of higher pork prices as the African swine fever dents supply. And while trade tensions with the United States have affected the price of soya beans, which are used as animal feed, progress in talks could result in China importing



A pig farm in Liaoning province, China. The likelihood of higher pork prices as the African swine fever dents supply could have played a part in driving up the pig farmers' performance on the exchange index, say analysts. PHOTO: REUTERS

more from America, lowering breeders' costs, said Mr Dai Ming, a Shanghai-based fund manager at Hengsheng Asset Management.

A pork producer stood out in Hong Kong too, with WH Group climbing more than 8 per cent over the past three days.

In another boost, the govern-

ment has promised to support share listing and fundraising by qualified agriculture firms, according to official guidelines. There may also be a longer-term, structural reason for the bullish mood.

"The agriculture sector has had a totally different story to tech firms over the past few years," said China

Vision Capital Management's president Sun Jianbo in Beijing. "China is still at the early stage of large-scale farming and, with this trend picking up, the sector's revenue is growing steadily."

Muyuan and Wens Foodstuffs Group, another meat producer, have more than doubled their profit since 2014, though they've yet to report 2018 earnings. Wens Foodstuffs has risen 16 per cent in Shenzhen this year to Tuesday, about half the advance by Muyuan, which has driven much of the Shenzhen agricultural gauge's advance over the past three years as it more than tripled in value.

Gains in farming-related stocks have made them much more expensive. The agriculture gauge in Shenzhen trades at about 49 times reported earnings – more than double the broader index – according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Shenzhen's agriculture index rose 0.1 per cent as at 10.43am in the city yesterday, while the broader gauge climbed 1.1 per cent.

Meanwhile, tech firms "have seen the business environment worsening," Hengsheng's Mr Dai said. "For example, the smartphone supply chain is seeing intensifying competition and shrinking margins."

After years of breakneck expansion, global smartphone makers are grappling with slowing revenue growth. Apple's Chinese phone shipments sank an estimated 20 per cent in the final quarter last year, while Xiaomi fared even worse, research firm IDC said this week.

"Tech stocks bumped into a boom-and-bust cycle over the past three to five years," Mr Sun said. "In the long run, agricultural stocks are still attractive. China has many small family farms, which is inefficient – they will be transformed into large-scale farms in the future." BLOOMBERG

Tracker halts plan to trade 'crypto' basket

STOCKHOLM • The creator of the first exchange-traded bitcoin tracker has called a halt on launching a basket of cryptocurrencies to trade on after splits in the blockchain caused uncertainty over what to include.

XBT Provider was not able to launch an exchange-traded product based on a basket as planned late last year, and wanted to wait and see which way the cryptocurrency community moved before acting, according to Mr Laurent Kssis, the company's chief executive officer.

Stockholm-based XBT "didn't have a clue" when it got the regulatory clearance from the Swedish financial supervisory authority back in May about the so-called "forks" that had developed, said Mr Kssis.

"It's important to ask how the community is responding to the split and who's going to support one asset versus the other," said Mr Kssis. "If we get it wrong, these assets will drop and if they're part of the basket, we can't go back because it's in the final term sheet."

A fork happens when the blockchain that a cryptocurrency is based on splits into one underlying and one dominant asset. This can happen due to security upgrades or hacking, among other things.

While a soft fork can be made compatible with the older version, a hard fork cannot.

Bloomberg Intelligence strategist Mike McGlone said: "Hard forks are indicative of some of the primary issues in cryptos pressuring prices."

He added: "The overall issue is rapidly increasing crypto supply and negative signals for potential institutional investors of how still nascent the market is."

Cryptocurrencies have continued their slide in 2019 after losing about US\$500 billion (S\$678 billion) in market value last year, according to data from CoinMarketCap.com.

The plunge took hold as widespread adoption failed to materialise, funding from initial coin offerings dried up and profitability of miners, whose servers support bitcoin network's operations, collapsed.

The total market capitalisation of cryptocurrencies is now about US\$120 billion.

BLOOMBERG

UNCERTAINTIES AHEAD

It's important to ask how the community is responding to the split and who's going to support one asset versus the other.



MR LAURENT KSSIS, chief executive officer of XBT Provider AB.

S. Korea jobless rate jumps to 9-year high

SEJONG • South Korea's unemployment rate jumped to a nine-year high last month as more people shunned low-paying work in the face of rising minimum wages, putting further pressure on the economy and deepening policy frustrations for President Moon Jae-in.

The unemployment rate rose to 4.4 per cent last month in seasonally adjusted terms, the highest since the 4.7 per cent level posted in January 2010, with most of the job losses seen in manufacturing and construction sectors, data from Statistics Korea showed yesterday.

Vanishing jobs are hitting Asia's fourth-largest economy at a time when the trade dispute between the United States and China – its two biggest trading partners – threatens to hurt the world's sixth-largest exporter. Exports declined last month as sales to China shrank for a third month in a row, adding to the strains for jobs in South Korea's manufacturing and services sectors.

"The trade disputes haven't hit the nation's manufacturers yet and recent job losses are more related to local restructuring issues and the minimum wage hikes hitting self-employed businesses," said Mr Lee Sang-jae, an analyst at Eugene Investment and Securities.

"Having said that, manufacturers are likely to hire even fewer workers should this exports downturn continue." In December, the jobless rate was 3.8 per cent.

A combined hike in the nation's mandatory minimum wages over only two years has led to a drop in low-paying jobs across retailers, construction and retail sectors in a blow to the economy already grappling with slowing exports.

Effective from last month, the min-



Job seekers looking at advertisements at a job fair in Seoul last year. The unemployment rate rose to 4.4 per cent last month, the highest since January 2010, with most of the job losses seen in manufacturing and construction sectors, data from Statistics Korea showed yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Economists say a combination of falling exports, China's slowdown and a weaker labour market pose further risks for Asia's fourth-largest economy this year.

imum wage increased 10.9 per cent from last year to 8,350 won (S\$10) an hour, following a 16 per cent increase made for last year.

Workers at the manufacturing sector were the hardest hit last month, shedding 170,000 jobs from a year earlier. The construction sector and retailers also lost 19,000 jobs and 67,000 jobs respectively.

The spike in the jobless rate adds to economic policy frustrations and political challenges for President Moon, whose approval rating has dropped sharply in recent months.

Shortly after yesterday's data release, Finance Minister Hong Namki said at a policy meeting the government will be making "all-out efforts to achieve its goal to create 150,000 jobs" this year.

Economists say a combination of

falling exports, China's slowdown and a weaker labour market pose further risks for Asia's fourth-largest economy this year.

The rising risks to growth has prompted the central bank to adopt a more cautious approach to policy. Last month, the Bank of Korea left the policy rate unchanged at 1.75 per cent, while trimming the growth outlook amid a cooling global economy.

Minutes of that meeting released on Tuesday showed a majority of BOK board members see inflation pressures remaining weak, reinforcing market consensus that policymakers would stand pat for some time. REUTERS

Margate Point makes second bid to sell en bloc

Owners of a 15-unit apartment development in Margate Road in Katong are making a second collective sale attempt, with a move towards lowering their reserve price.

About 70 per cent of the owners have agreed to cutting the reserve price to \$36.5 million from \$38 million, said marketing agent JLL yesterday.

Margate Point is off Meyer Road

and Mountbatten Road, and has a land area of about 12,800 sq ft.

It is zoned residential with an allowable gross plot ratio (GPR) of 2.1 under the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Master Plan 2014.

The lower reserve price would translate to a land rate of around \$1,362 per square foot per plot ratio for a redevelopment up to GPR of

2.1, said the property professional services firm.

The property may be redeveloped into a high-rise apartment project comprising a maximum of 24 units with an average size of 100 sq m per unit, according to JLL.

It may also be suitable as a serviced residence or as a co-living development, subject to approval

from the authorities.

If approval is given for serviced apartments, the development will be able to accommodate about 50 to 60 rooms.

"The collective sale committee is optimistic that should an offer be received for the property, they stand a good chance of securing unanimous owners' consent for the sale," JLL said.

PRIME CHINATOWN • FULL COMMERCIAL SHOPHOUSES

SOUTH BRIDGE ROAD

- 3-storey shophouse
- Rare full F&B approval
- Site area: Approx. 97.4 sq m / 1,049 sq ft
- Floor area: Approx. 250.8 sq m / 2,700 sq ft
- Excellent main road frontage
- Public car park at the back of the property
- Less than 200m from Chinatown MRT Interchange and Telok Ayer MRT stations

SAGO STREET

- 3-storey shophouse
- Site area: Approx. 103.9 sq m / 1,119 sq ft
- Floor area: Approx. 297.3 sq m / 3,200 sq ft
- Right next to the grand Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum
- Immediate catchment of tourists
- Less than 100m from the upcoming Maxwell MRT station

Contact Capital Markets
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9878 2372

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GOOD CLASS BUNGALOW
Beautifully Designed GCB in Prime Bukit Timah

- Freehold
- Site Area: Approx. 27,320 sq ft
- Situated within one of Singapore's most exclusive residential enclaves, Bukit Park
- Extremely regular, corner plot enjoying 45m wide road frontage
- Excellent move-in condition, perfect for immediate occupation
- Ideal for multi-tier families
- Within 2km to Methodist Girls' School (Primary) and Pei Hwa Presbyterian Primary School

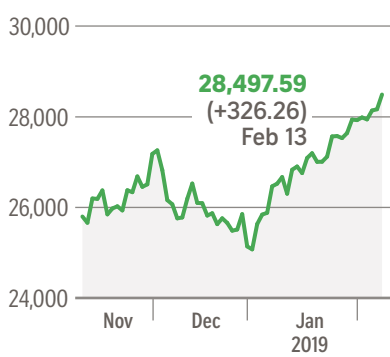
Contact Capital Markets
SAMMI LIM
(Salesperson Reg No.: R030399A)
9368 9803

SOPHIA LIM
(Salesperson Reg No.: R056087E)
9878 2372

Tender Closing Date:
1 March 2019, Friday, at 3pm

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Hang Seng



Shanghai Comp



Nikkei 225



Dow Jones



BullsAndBears

Markets up on hope of trade talks breakthrough

Lowered threat of US govt shutdown also boosts sentiment; banks lead STI's rise

Leila Lai

Markets looking for a boost from positive trade talk news got something like it after US President Donald Trump told reporters on Tuesday that he is open to extending the deadline for a US-China agreement if the two parties appear close to a deal.

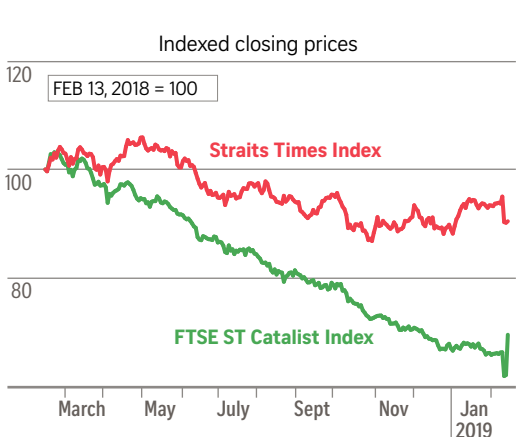
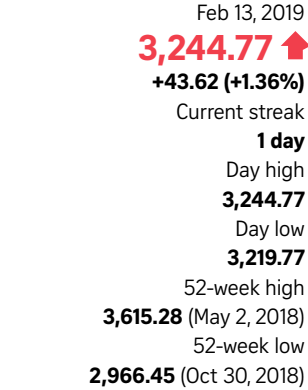
Global markets climbed broadly, gaining on the hope for a breakthrough in the trade talks due to start today.

Another threat to sentiment showed signs of lifting, when Mr Trump expressed unhappiness but not direct objection to the latest deal on border security brokered by a bipartisan Congress committee. The agreement, meant to avert a government shutdown due tomorrow, offers just US\$1.375 billion (S\$1.87 billion) in border wall funding, which Republican leaders have called a “down payment” on the wall.

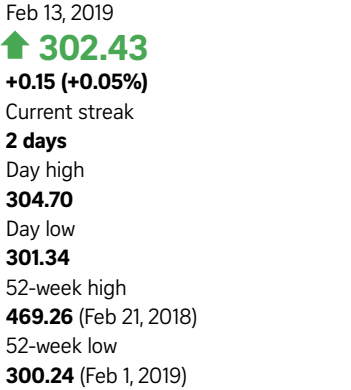
Mr Trump is expected to go along with the deal, albeit grudgingly, thus averting another shutdown of the federal government.

As things stand, the upcoming deadlines look as though they may pass without incident, said ING's chief economist and head of research, Asia-Pacific, Mr Robert Carnell. “This may not be a bad thing if it means that the chances of a deal of some sort, whether on

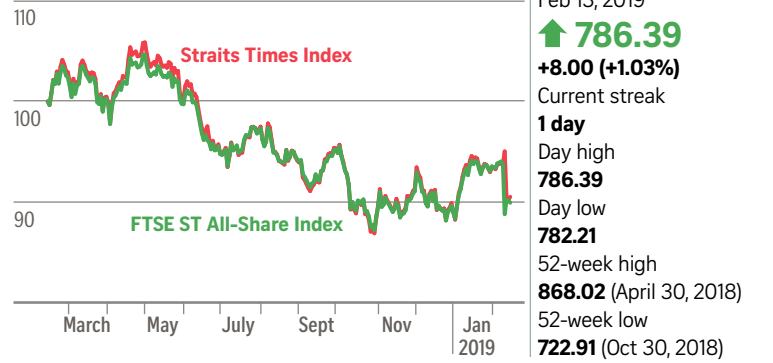
Straits Times Index



FTSE ST Catalyst Index



FTSE ST All-Share Index



US-China trade, the US border wall or Brexit, are increased.”

Singapore's Straits Times Index (STI) traded upwards all day, closing 1.36 per cent or 43.62 points higher at 3,244.77. Turnover on the bourse was 1.29 billion shares

worth \$1.23 billion, and gainers outnumbered losers 223 to 191.

Rex International led active trading, losing 0.1 cent or 1.06 per cent to 9.3 cents on 73.2 million shares traded. It was followed by Ezion Holdings, which gave up 0.2 cent or

Insider trading lawsuit filed by CBS shareholders

WASHINGTON • Current and former executives of broadcaster CBS sold shares in the company before sexual harassment allegations against then-chief executive officer Leslie Moonves became public, according to a lawsuit filed in New York.

The suit was presented on Monday by shareholders who are asking a judge to give them class action status, reported The Wall Street Journal. Named in the lawsuit are Mr Moonves, who resigned in September, acting CEO Joe Ianniello, chief accounting officer Lawrence Liding and former communications chief Gil Schwartz.

The suit alleges that the four men sold more than 3.4 million shares worth over US\$200 million (\$\$271 million) before CBS announced in July that it would investigate Mr Moonves for alleged sexual harassment.

The complaint was filed by the Construction Labourers Pension Trust for Southern California. It argued that the timing and amount of the sales “were unusual and suspicious”.

The insider trading lawsuit says Mr Moonves sold stock valued at US\$155.3 million between June 2017 and May last year, and during this period CBS knew of media inquiries about sexual harassment claims against him. The Journal said CBS and Mr Moonves deny these allegations.

The suit seeks compensatory damages, on grounds that the value of CBS stock was inflated. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK		COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST		+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
HIGH	LOW		TRADED	SALE				
278	245	Ascendas Reit	273		unch	13067	5.9	1.3
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	187		-1	15782	4.7	1
380	298	Capitaland	333		+3	6418	3.6	0.7
243	195	CapitaMall Trust	237		-1	15525	4.9	1.2
1359	780	CityDev	948		+21	2089	1.9	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	238		+5	13690	4.4	2
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2490		+56	5086	5.7	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US885		+7	753	2.4	-
133	85.5	Genting Sing	110		+1	23508	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	26		+1	10159	3.1	0.6
37	22.5	HPH Trust USD	US25	cd	-1	15787	10.5	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US711		+1	2123	2.8	0.3
7006	1099	JMH USD	US7006		+173	357	2.3	0.8
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3978		+47	135	0.8	0.5
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3650		+15	535	3.1	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp	614	cd	+11	3995	4.9	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1165		+16	4765	3.2	1.2
564	455	SATS	498		+12	3354	3.6	3.5
778	672	SGX	768		+10	2945	3.9	9.6
1184	914	SIA	973		+8	1489	4.1	0.8
292	231	SPH	250		+2	1543	5.2	1.1
377	321	ST Engineering	376		+2	4806	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind	262		+8	5433	1.9	0.7
358	283	Singtel	303		unch	20484	6.8	1.7
92	57.5	ThaiBev	72.5		+0.5	43607	0.9	3.6
3037	2380	UOB	2596		+62	2883	3.9	1.2
898	591	UOL	657		+8	1587	2.7	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1649		+61	1758	3.6	2.1
335	297	Wilmar Intl	325		+1	3347	3.1	0.9
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	142		+1	29009	3.2	1

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV	
278	245	Ascendas Reit	273	unch	13067	5.9	1.3	
120	105	Ascott Reit	114	-1	3710	6.3	1	
74.5	59	Bumitama Agri	68	unch	78	1.1	1.6	
178	143	CDL HTrust	155	-3	2614	-	1	
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	187	-1	15782	4.7	1	
380	298	Capitaland	333	+3	6418	3.6	0.7	
243	195	CapitaMall Trust	237	-1	15525	4.9	1.2	
164	133	CapitaR China Tr	139	xd	3	2929	7.4	0.9
1359	780	CityDev	948	+21	2089	1.9	0.8	
251	196	ComfortDelGro	238	+5	13690	4.4	2	
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2490	+56	5086	5.7	1.4	
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US885	+7	753	2.4	0.7	
73.5	59	Far East HTrust	63.5	-0.5	8138	-	0.7	
183	150	First Resources	172	-1	553	4	2.2	
231	212	Fraser's Cpt Tr	226	-3	910	5.3	108.7	
112	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	109	-1	4482	6.3	1.2	
133	85.5	Genting Sing	110	+1	23508	3.2	1.7	
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	26	+1	10159	3.1	0.6	
224	167	GuocoLand Ltd	186	+1	109	3.8	0.6	
37	23	HPH Trust USD	US25	-1	15787	10.5	0.4	
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US711	+1	2123	2.8	0.3	
7006	1099	JMH USD	US7006	+173	357	2.3	0.8	
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3978	+47	135	0.8	0.5	
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3650	+15	535	3.1	1.8	
58	44.5	Kepp Infra Tr	50	+0.5	9941	7.4	1.8	
835	567	Keppel Corp	614	cd	+11	3995	4.9	1
124	108	Keppel Reit	123	unch	8121	4.5	0.9	
151	151	M1	204	cd	-1	358	5.5	3.6
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US202	-3	39	1.5	1.5	
186	152	Mapletree Com Tr	176	-3	6209	5.1	1.2	
206	184	Mapletree Ind Tr	199	cd	unch	5543	5.9	1.3
140	118	Mapletree Log Tr	135	-1	14279	5.6	1.2	
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr	124	-2	10298	6	0.9	
83	73	NetLink NBN Tr	80.5	unch	10149	-	1	
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1165	+16	4765	3.2	1.2	
199	136	OUE	153	-1	92	2	0.3	
87	64.5	OUE HTrust	71	unch	1058	-	0.9	
250	157	Olam Intl	191	+2	585	3.9	1	
59	28	Oxley	31	+1.5	4643	4.8	0.9	
291	256	ParkwayLife Reit	280	-1	671	4.6	1.5	
121	98	Raffles Medical	111	unch	606	2	2.6	
564	455	SATS	498	+12	3354	3.6	3.5	
778	672	SGX	768	+10	2945	3.9	9.6	
1184	914	SIA	973	+8	1489	4.1	0.8	
336	220	SIA Engineering	234	+3	944	5.6	1.8	
292	231	SPH	250	+2	1543	5.2	1.1	
103	98	SPHREIT	101	-1	959	5.5	1.1	
377	321	ST Engineering	376	+2	4806	4	5.5	
341	243	Sembcorp Ind	262	+8	5433	1.9	0.7	
269	149	Sembcorp Marine	161	+3	12269	1.2	1.4	
58	39	Silverlake Axis	51	unch	5813	5.9	7.4	
145	88.5	SingPost	95	cd	-0.5	1836	3.7	1.3
358	283	Singtel	303	unch	20484	6.8	1.7	
286	158	StarHub	189	-1	1470	8.5	5.8	
74	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	69	-1	5683	6.6	0.8	
199	163	Suntec Reit	187	-3	13907	5.3	0.9	
92	57.5	ThaiBev	72.5	+0.5	43607	0.9	3.6	
10.2	37	Thomson Medical	7.8	-0.2	22258	-	2.8	
3037	2380	UOB	2596	+62	2883	3.9	1.2	
898	591	UOL	657	+6	1587	2.7	0.6	
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1649	+61	1758	3.6	2.1	
335	297	Wilmar Intl	325	+1	3347	3.1	0.9	
226	183	Wing Tai	203	unch	83	3.9	0.5	
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	142	+1	29009	3.2	1	
182	116	Yanlord Land	140	+1	3322	4.9	0.6	

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV	
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	136	xd	-3	442	7.6	1
68.5	48	Accordia Golf Tr	55	unch	257	7	0.6	
86.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	85	unch	1033	-	0.9	
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	111	+1	1751	5.5	1.3	
58	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	131	-0.1	2566	49.6	0.2	
64	48	Banyan Tree	59.5	-1	211	1.7	0.8	
333	115	Best World	329	unch	4506	1.2	11.8	
85.5	76	Boustead	79.5	-0.5	46	3.8	1.2	
126	79.5	BreadTalk	89.5	-1	374	7.8	2.4	
632	521	Bukit Sembawang	560	-4	27	3.2	1.1	
87	65.5	Cache Log Trust	71	-0.5	3155	8.3	1.1	
52	39.5	Centurion	40.5	unch	127	6.2	0.7	
166	104	China Aviation	129	unch	1339	3.5	1.1	
46	29.5	China Everbright	34.5	+0.5	1892	1.4	0.7	
165	90.5	China Sunshine	133	-1	1914	2.3	1.5	
103	64	Chip Eng Seng	71	+0.5	3010	5.6	0.6	
53.5	31.5	Cosco	36.5	+1	8477	-	1.6	
700	302	Delong	573	-4	12	-	0.6	
27.5	17.5	Duty Free Intl	20	-	-	9.3	1.3	
77	67.5	EC World Reit	74.5	unch	315	8.1	0.9	
59	47	ESR-REIT	52.5	+1	3593	7.4	1.1	
140	92	First Reit	106	+1	1204	8.1	1	
152	135	Fraser's Com Tr	145	-2	3312	6.6	0.9	
80	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	72.5	-1	760	-	1	
25.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	19.7	-0.1	249	5.1	1.2	
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	78	+0.5	1407	2.9	2.4	
67.5	52	Health Mgt Intl	55	cd	+1.5	161	0.6	5.3
279	73	Hi-P Intl	103	+2	6415	24.3	1.6	
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	268	unch	113	4.9	0.6	
80.5	71	IREIT Global	75	-0.5	369	7.9	1	
37	18.3	Indofood Agri	22	+0.5	216	-	0.3	
84	43	Japfa	79	+0.5	1878	0.6	1.5	
76.5	49	KSH	52	+1.5	42	4.2	0.9	
85	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	66.5	unch	284	9.4	0.6	
149	128	Keppel DC Reit	145	+2	13616	5	1.4	
189	132	Keppel T&T	188	unch	81	-	1.2	
119	7	KrisEnergy	83	unch	12951	-	1	
71	44.5	Lian Beng	48.5	-0.5	215	4.6	0.4	
40.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	24	-0.5	5441	14.3	0.9	
53	29.5	MM2 Asia	30	-3	4531	-	1.7	
95	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	86	cd	unch	988	6.5	0.8
120	95	Metro	101	+1.5	97	5	0.6	
21	5	Noble	81	susp	-	-	-	
63.4	45	OUE Com Reit	49.5	unch	1995	7	0.7	
66	54	PEC	56	-1	76	3.6	0.6	
39.5	17	POSH	18.3	unch	2	-	0.5	
64.5	44.5	Q&M Dental	47.5	-0.5	654	3.4	3.4	
110	55.5	QAF Ltd	70	+0.5	128	7.1	0.8	
124	96	Riverstone	112	unch	17	2.1	3.7	
54.5	22	SIIC Environment	35	+1.5	1137	-	0.6	
45	38	Sabana Reit	41.5	-0.5	601	7.7	0.7	
119	91	Sheng Siong	109	+1	615	3	6	
25.5	3.3	Sino Grandness	5.5	+0.2	1334	-	0.1	
69	50.5	SoilbuildBizReit	60	-0.5	684	8.8	1	
129	86	Tianjin ZX USD	93	+2	478	-	0.8	
46.5	32.5	Tuan Sing	38.5	cd	unch	325	2.3	0.4
136	54	UMS	68.5	+0.5	3896	7.3	1.6	
112	58.5	Valuetronics	74	+0.5	2360	6.2	1.6	
15	8.3	Ying Li Intl	12.5	unch	2409	-	0.3	
48.5	24	Yoma Strategic	34.5	-2	7312	0.7	0.5	
33	16.1	Yongnam	17.2	-0.1	1155	-	0.3	

Ground handler and in-flight catering services provider Sats said yesterday that revenue for the third quarter grew 5.5 per cent to \$464 million, compared with a year ago.
ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR



Sats’ net profit rises 3.5% to \$68.9m in Q3

Increase due to growth in food solutions and gateway services

Sats saw third-quarter net profit rise 3.5 per cent to \$68.9 million, following growth in food solutions and gateway services, and higher contributions from its associates and joint ventures.

The ground handler and in-flight catering services provider said yesterday that revenue for the third quarter grew 5.5 per cent to \$464 million, compared with a year ago.

This came on the back of increased volume growth in food solutions, with growth across all its core catering subsidiaries in Singapore, Japan and China.

Revenue was also boosted by gateway services, which rose on the back of higher contributions from Sats ground services at Singapore Changi Airport’s Terminal 4 and cruise terminal operations at Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore.

Furthermore, shares of profits from associates and joint ventures in the third quarter was \$20.7 million, up 51.1 per cent on year – par-

Sats said that despite the slowdown in the global economy, increasing volumes in the aviation industry and strong demand for convenient food in Asian cities are creating growth opportunities for the company.

ticularly due to a \$5.8 million gain from DFASS Sats’ disposal of business to KrisShop.

Earnings per share rose from 6 Singapore cents a year ago to 6.2 Singapore cents this quarter.

For the nine months ending Dec 31, 2018, Sats saw net profit increase 1.2 per cent to \$198.5 million.

Revenue gained 4.3 per cent year on year to \$1.36 billion, as food solutions and gateway services volumes grew.

Sats said that despite the slowdown in the global economy, increasing volumes in the aviation industry and strong demand for convenient food in Asian cities are creating growth opportunities for the company.

China is also a “key market... for scale and connectivity” and it has invested in ground and cargo handling, and catering operations at the new Daxing International Airport in Beijing.

Sats’ counter closed up 2.47 per cent or \$0.12 to \$4.98, before the results were announced.

StanChart names new head of global banking in S’pore

Standard Chartered Bank announced yesterday that it has hired Ms Chow Wan Thonh from rival HSBC as its head of global banking in Singapore.

She succeeds Mr Patrick Lee, following his promotion to chief executive officer of StanChart Singapore in July last year.

Ms Chow will be in charge of driving and implementing the bank’s business strategy, while strengthening ties with its corporate and institutional clients in Singapore, the bank said in a press statement.

She headed HSBC’s global banking in Singapore and also its corporates, financials and multinational banking for South-east Asia.

The Singaporean holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from the National University of

Singapore. She has more than 25 years of experience in developing and executing business across transaction banking, capital markets and strategic advisory for corporate and institutional clients, said StanChart.

Based in Singapore, Ms Chow will report to Mr Bharat Padmanabhan, the regional head of global banking, Asean and South Asia,



Ms Chow Wan Thonh, who used to head HSBC’s global banking in Singapore, succeeds Mr Patrick Lee, who is now StanChart Singapore CEO.

and Mr Lee. She will also join the bank’s Singapore country management team.

In the statement, Mr Lee said: “Singapore is a core market for the bank. The country’s value proposition as an international financial centre and a gateway to Asia continues to attract regional and global companies to the city state, using it as a base for regional expansion.

“Singapore corporates and institutions are also accelerating their outward investments in the region and further afield.

“With her in-depth knowledge of the client segment and solid track record in driving team performance, I am confident that Wan Thonh will lead our team in Singapore to deliver strong results and build sustainable value for our clients.”

Interbank currency rates

Currencies	Against \$	Feb 13	Against US\$	Feb 13
	Bid	Offer	Bid	Offer
\$S/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9651	0.9655	0.7120	0.7121
Canadian dollar	1.0251	1.0256	0.7565	0.7563
Euro	15.340	15.350	1.1317	1.1322
NZ dollar	0.9261	0.9266	0.6832	0.6834
Sterling pound	1.7487	1.7498	1.2901	1.2906
US dollar	1.3555	1.3558	-	-
\$S/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	20.0524	20.0601	14.7933	14.7957
Danish kroner	20.5566	20.5642	15.1653	15.1676
Hong Kong dollar	17.27	17.28	12.7415	12.7419
Indian Rupee	192	192	14.149	14.156
Indonesian rupiah	0.0096	0.0097	0.0071	0.0071
Japanese yen	122.45	122.51	0.9033	0.9036
Korean won	0.1207	0.1209	0.0890	0.0892
Malaysian ringgit	33.28	33.33	24.5519	24.5821
New Taiwan dollar	4.3956	4.4008	3.2428	3.2459
Norwegian krone	15.6948	15.7074	11.5786	11.5853
Philippine peso	26.002	26.018	1.9183	1.9190
Saudi riyal	36.1438	36.1527	26.6645	26.6652
Swedish krona	14.6288	14.6367	10.7921	10.7956
Swiss franc	134.6612	134.7178	99.3443	99.3641
Thai Baht	4.3265	4.3316	3.1918	3.1949

Government securities

GOVERNMENT BONDS						Feb 13
Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	High	Day's Low
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	101.95	101.95	101.94
5-Year	NS19100A	2.000%	01-Feb-24	99.90	99.95	99.85
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	103.96	103.70	103.70
15-Year	NZ13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	111.94	112.10	112.00
20-Year	NI16100X	2.250%	01-Aug-36	97.1	0.00	0.00
30-Year	NA16100H	2.750%	01-Mar-46	102.99	103.05	102.55

Note: Based on latest issue

Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore

MSCI INDICES

Feb 11	Index	In local curr %	%dy	%yr
World Preliminary	1548.7	0.2	7.4	
EAFE Preliminary	1065.9	0.6	5.8	
Europe Preliminary	1494.7	0.9	6.4	
Australia	1217.7	-0.3	6.7	
Austria Preliminary	543.4	0.9	9.1	
Belgium Preliminary	1001.5	0.9	9.5	
Canada Preliminary	1994.4	-0.1	8.9	
Denmark Preliminary	7933.2	1.1	7.1	
Finland Preliminary	725.4	0.7	11.1	
France Preliminary	1812.8	1.0	5.8	
Germany Preliminary	879.9	1.0	4.3	
Greece Preliminary	46.1	1.5	6.3	
India	1264.4	-0.8	0.1	
Indonesia	7362.0	-0.4	4.1	
Ireland Preliminary	194.2	1.4	8.4	
Israel Preliminary	252.8	0.7	9.6	
Italy Preliminary	663.8	1.0	6.7	
Japan	921.2	0.0	3.1	
Korea	653.6	0.2	8.2	
Malaysia	586.2	0.0	0.8	
Netherlands Preliminary	1595.9	0.7	9.5	
New Zealand	140.6	0.4	6.0	
Norway Preliminary	2882.3	0.4	3.5	
Pakistan	399.5	-1.9	11.9	
Philippines	1368.5	0.0	8.4	
Portugal Preliminary	84.6	0.3	4.8	
Singapore	1666.1	-0.1	4.5	
Singapore Free	358.2	-0.1	4.5	

Source: MSCI

Company Briefs

Frasers Hospitality

After more than 20 years at the helm of Frasers Hospitality, Mr Choe Peng Sum, 58, will retire as chief executive tomorrow.

He will take up the role of senior adviser to Frasers Property from this weekend.

The recruitment of Mr Choe’s successor is “progressing well”, the property group said in a statement.

Frasers Property’s chief executive, Mr Panote Sirivadhanabhakdi, said that during his tenure, Mr Choe grew the portfolio under management from Fraser Suites in Singapore in 1998 to more than 150 serviced residences and hotels in 80 cities with assets under management valued at \$4.8 billion.

He added: “Under his stewardship, Peng Sum built a well-recognised, highly awarded global brand and launched Frasers Hospitality Trust, the first global hotel and serviced residence trust to be listed on the SGX.”

Boustead Projects

Boustead Projects saw net profit fall 15 per cent for the third quarter ended Dec 31 last year to \$6.8 million, from \$8 million for the year-ago period, the industrial real estate solutions provider announced on Tuesday night after the market closed.

This was despite revenue soaring 70 per cent to \$81.3 million, from \$47.9 million for the year-ago period, which the group attributed to higher design-and-build revenue, partially offset by lower real estate revenue with the lease expiry of 85 Tuas South Avenue 1 in January last year.

Earnings per share for the third quarter was 2.2 Singapore cents, down 12 per cent year on year from 2.5 Singapore cents.

Boustead Projects said the lower third-quarter profit was mainly due to slightly lower gross margins on ongoing projects, lower cost savings from previously completed projects, and an increase in the elimination of its share of unrealised construction and project management profits mainly from joint venture projects.

The group highlighted that as its revenue is largely derived from project-oriented business, quarterly results may not accurately reflect full-year performance. The latest results took net profit for the first nine months to \$24.9 million, up 7 per cent year on year.

Boustead Projects’ current order book backlog stands at \$679 million, with a record \$615 million worth of contracts secured since the start of FY2019. Managing director Thomas Chu said that a \$242 million contract secured in December with JTC Corporation and a \$200 million contract won in January with Surbana Jurong are expected to contribute significantly to revenue in the 2020 and 2021 financial years.

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Today in **THE BUSINESS TIMES**
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LIANHE ZAOBAO

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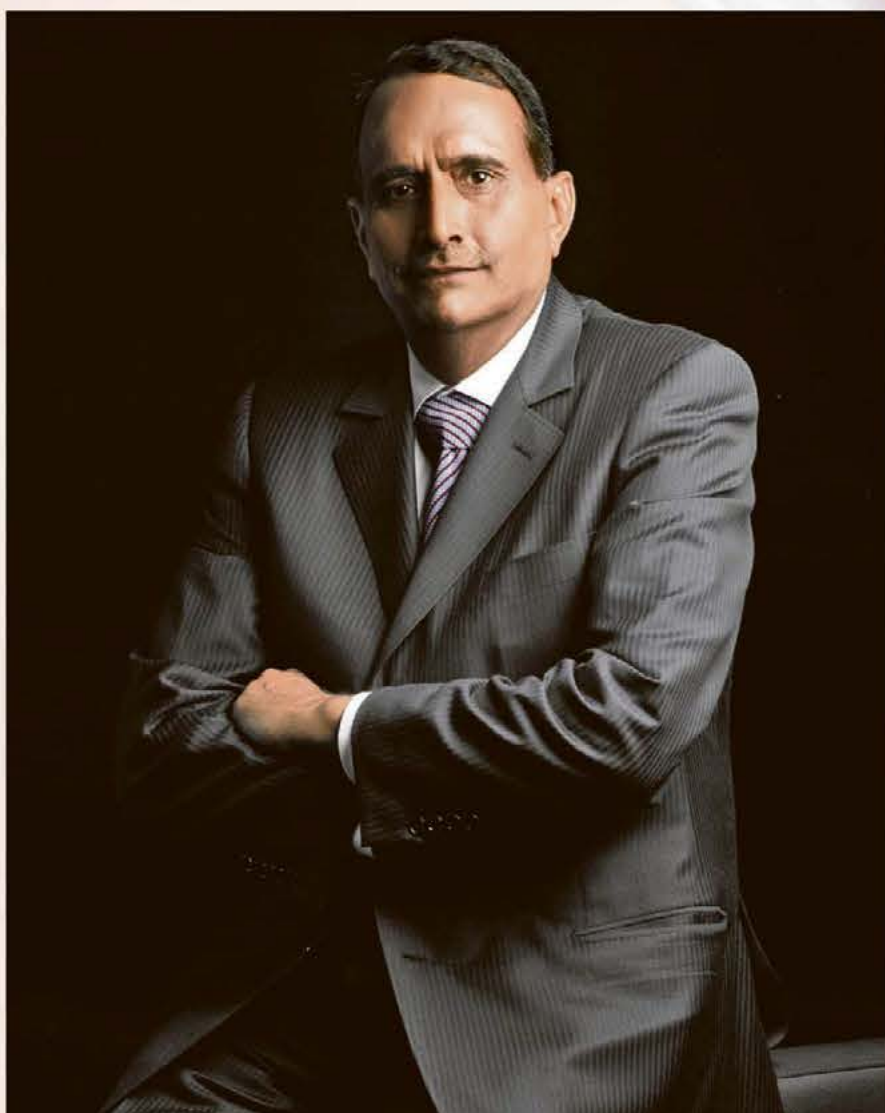
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On The 9th Anniversary In Loving Memory Of



Vinod Kumar Gomber

Departed 14th February 2010

*His memory is as dear today,
As in the hour he passed away.*

Always remembered by
Meena Gomber and Vivek Gomber

In Loving Memory of MR VINOD KUMAR GOMBER

Departed on 14 February 2010



*"Time changes
many things,
But not the memory
this day brings."*

Always
remembered by
Yip Linda

The Family of the Late



Mdm Yap Eng Neo @ Yip Eng Neo

Age: 88
Departed on 8 February 2019

Wish to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends and colleagues for their kind assistance, attendance, condolences, donations and wreaths during their recent bereavement.

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7
"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone,
O LORD, make me dwell in safety." Psalm 4:8*



Yau Giak Kim

Age: 91

Was called home to be with the Lord on 12 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Ng Seng Yong (deceased)

Children:

Ng Bee Luan
Ng Chor Yau
Ng Chor Chin (deceased)
Ng Bee Gek
Ng Chor Kah (deceased)
Thomas Ng Chor Sin
Ng Bee Lian
Shaun Ng Chor Chuan
Ng Bee Kim

Grandchildren:

Lydia Wade Teo Say Lian
Elijah Teo Tzee Siong
Christopher Ng Wu-Hsien
Michelle Ng Ee Lin
Ng Wu Gang
Ng Yi Ning
Samuel Huang Wu Liang
Jason Huang Wu Xiang
Melissa Huang Yan Ting
Daniella Natasha Ng Hui
Gabriel Choo Wei Liang
Isaac Ng Wu Jie

Great-Grandchildren:

Zoe Victoria Grace Wade, Nathanael Arya Teo, Noah Arjun Teo,
Blyss Marie Ng Hui Yan and Kyber Luke Ng Yi Yang

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Block 139 Toa Payoh Lorong 1A, Singapore 310139.

Night service on Friday 15 February 2019 at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Saturday 16 February 2019 at 9.05am
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 10.05am.

Spouses:

Teo Hock Joo
Geraldine Chan Eng Hoe
Yang Lan Ying

Jenny Gee Tai Sew

Lydia Cynthia Koh Che Sing
Andrew Choo Liang Joo
Leong Suet Heng

Spouses:

Tim Wade
Bridget Vithia Robert
Audrey Tan Wan Wei

Peggy Wang

Amanda Ong Hui En
Ian Lim



C.P.S. Nathan

Age: 90

Passed away peacefully on
13 February 2019, dearly missed
and remembered by loved ones.

Late Wife: Eliathamby Ratnam

Sons & Daughters-in-law:

Chelva Rajah
Naga Rajah & Jamunadevi
Late Tharmarajah & Mahalochini

Kanak Rajah Gary

Ella Rajah & Latha

Daughter & Son-in-law:

Celvarani & Dharmarajah

Grandsons

& Granddaughters-in-law:

Vijayarajah

Vignarajah & Gayathri

Devarajah & Nishanthi

Jeevan & Reshmi

Karthikeyan Rajah

Devan, Suria and Jagannesh

Granddaughters:

Elizabethrani, Eliarani

Jhothy and Kriesha

Great-Grandchildren:

Sharvin, Thashvin and Kharshini

Brother, sister-in-law,

nephews, nieces,

relatives, friends

and caregiver Sathya

He is resting at Block 469

Jurong West Street 41 #02-471,

Singapore 640469 from Thursday

14 February 2019, 2.00pm onwards.

Cortege leaves on Thursday

14 February 2019 at 5.30pm

for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1

for cremation at 6.30pm.

Tel: 9680 0359 / 8733 9774

11th Anniversary In Loving Memory Of



C.K. GOVINDAN

Departed 14 Feb '08

Always remembered by

wife - Sarala

daughter - Sumita

son-in-law - Subhash

grand-children -

Shreya & Avaneesh,

all relatives and friends



S. Ramasamy

Age: 68

Was called home to be with

the Lord on 13 February 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly

remembered by wife, sons,

daughter-in-law, grandson,

all relatives and friends.

Wake at Block 423 Choa Chu Kang

Avenue 4 #07-246, (S) 680423.

Cortege leaves on Thursday

14 February 2019 at 5.00pm

for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2

for cremation at 6.00pm.

In loving memory, Barry Masters.



Barry Masters passed away peacefully on
February 13th, 2019, aged 83 years.

Fondly remembered by John Glajz, his family
and the staff in our company who knew
and worked with him.

We could not have done it without you, Uncle Barry!!
You will be sadly missed.

May you Rest In Peace.

From:
The Management and Staff of
GLAJZ

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SPORT

5-0

RAFFLES INSTITUTION'S PERFECT SCORE IN B DIVISION TENNIS FINAL C9

GETTING TO NUB OF THE HUB

SportSG, SHPL working to tackle issues to deliver a ‘first-class’ facility for Singaporeans

Sazali Abdul Aziz

National sports agency Sport Singapore said yesterday it is working together with SportsHub Pte Ltd (SHPL) to “get to the nub” of issues that have plagued the Sports Hub, as the two parties work towards making the venue one “that all Singaporeans can be proud of”.

The statement was made by a SportSG spokesman, in response to queries by The Straits Times on the

overall performance of SHPL in managing the \$1.33 billion facility, which opened its doors in June 2014.

The Sports Hub was in the news last month, after chief executive officer Oon Jin Teik abruptly announced his resignation on Jan 28.

The former national swimmer, who leaves after the April 13-14 HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens, will become the third person to vacate the post in just over three years, and his departure hinted that all was

not well within the SHPL.

It was reported that the public-private partnership (PPP) operating model of the Hub, which requires a balancing act between the public sector’s social objectives and the private sector’s profit motive, was at the centre of Oon’s decision to step down.

Under the arrangement, the Singapore Government makes annual payments of \$193.7 million to SHPL – a consortium of four equity partners – over a period of 25 years starting from 2010, to run the Sports Hub.

When asked whether the PPP model had strained relations between SHPL and the Government,

the SportSG spokesman said: “SHPL and SportSG want a Sports Hub that all Singaporeans can be proud of.

“To this end, we have been working together to get to the nub of the issues of the project.

“SportSG has made our views and expectations known, and SHPL has committed to addressing these issues going forward.”

When asked about the exit provisions for the Government to leave the contract and buy back control of the Sports Hub, the spokesman declined to comment, citing confidentiality obligations.

On whether the Government was considering such a move, he said

SportSG would not comment on speculation.

The spokesman added: “It is very important that the Sports Hub always strives to improve on its offerings and operations.

“SportSG will continue to hold SHPL accountable for the delivery of a first-class and vibrant sports, entertainment and lifestyle hub for Singaporeans.”

He also highlighted the “steady growth” in the number of sports events at the Hub since its opening, like the SEA Games, Asean Para Games, WTA Finals and rugby sevens, as well as the increase in daily traffic, and prevalence of community sport and exercise activities.

Last year, over 210 events were held at the Hub, which welcomed more than three million visitors.

SHPL has faced several challenges since the Sports Hub opened, from the quality of its pitch, to a leaky roof and sound issues during major concerts, to criticisms over its calendar.

The venue has also earned a reputation for being too cost-prohibitive, with the staging of events like the 2016 National Day Parade and the Asia Masters Track and Field Championships that same year threatened, until SHPL lowered rental rates.

msazali@sph.com.sg



While more than 210 events were held at the Hub last year with over three million visitors, it has come under fire for its less-than-stellar sporting line-up. PHOTO: SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB

Commentary

Sports Hub’s crown jewel must resonate with Singaporeans



Sazali Abdul Aziz

By April, the National Stadium will have hosted more concerts than ‘A’ international football matches involving the Singapore national team.

That doesn’t sound right. It cannot be right. After all, the 55,000-capacity National Stadium is the centrepiece of a state-of-the-art \$1.33 billion facility called the Singapore Sports Hub.

Since the Hub opened its gates in June 2014, the men’s football team have played 29 matches in Singapore. Only 14 of those were at the National Stadium.

In contrast, the Maroon 5 concert next month and Ed Sheeran’s show in April will take the number of concerts at the stadium to 16.

A variety of reasons contribute to why the Lions have played about

half their “home” matches at a venue touted as their den. But the statistic is nonetheless disappointing and it is why, for all its bells and whistles, the stadium is yet to resonate with the average Singaporean as a true home for sports.

No doubt, there has been effort to bring in world-class sporting events.

The Barclays Asia Trophy in 2015 and the four-year deal for the International Champions Cup will see the world’s top footballers spend part of their pre-season in Singapore until next year at least, while the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens, into its last edition on the current agreement, has been well-received in the series circuit.

Singapore is also one of five cities vying to host the prestigious ATP Finals – men’s tennis’ season-ender – at the National Stadium from 2021 to 2025.

Local events like the annual Singapore Open Track and Field Championships – which also features several Schools Nationals races – are a nice touch.

SportsHub Pte Ltd (SHPL) and Sport Singapore will also point to

The national footballers have long grumbled that they don’t feel like they have home-ground advantage when playing at the National Stadium.

the record 200-plus events and three million visitors to the Hub last year as figures which show the facility has served the social sector well.

But these numbers gloss over the tensions between the Government and SHPL – a private consortium comprising four equity partners – in balancing commercial and community needs as part of its public-private partnership.

For example, the staging of the 2016 National Day Parade was threatened after SHPL set a \$26 million price tag on 35 extra rehearsal days.

That year, the Asia Masters Athletics Championships almost moved to the more modest

3,500-seater Bishan Stadium after national body Singapore Athletics was quoted \$620,000 for four days’ rental – double the event’s entire budget.

Both the NDP and the Asian Masters meet eventually took place at the National Stadium, but only after the rental costs were reduced.

This strain between the Government and SHPL was said to be a factor in the sudden resignation of Sports Hub chief executive officer Oon Jin Teik on Jan 28. The former national swimmer is the Hub’s third CEO to step down in just over three years.

But, when it comes to the Sports Hub, the average sports fan will not care about the tussle between the private and public sectors, or if firms in a consortium cannot get along, or if a top official quits his post in a huff.

All he wants is to go down to the stadium most weeks and be able to find a worthy sporting event to attend.

This is why the old National Stadium – which hosted Malaysia Cup matches every other week for most of the year for two decades – had a special place in the hearts of

Singaporeans.

Now, even with a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Football Association of Singapore last March, the new National Stadium seems to lack a meaningful connection to the football community.

Last year, for example, the Lions played three friendly matches in Singapore before November’s AFF Suzuki Cup. Instead of getting a feel of the furrows at the National Stadium, where they would play two of their tournament matches, the Lions played their three tune-up games at Bishan.

Why? Because the months of September and October are a “no pitch period” for the Sports Hub, where its lay-and-play turf is removed and commercial events are able to be staged inside the stadium.

I happened to be at the Sports Hub on the afternoon of one of those Suzuki Cup friendlies, and could not help but shake my head and chuckle as I walked past banners that declared “HOME OF THE LIONS”.

The “no pitch period” is again scheduled for this September and

October, when the Lions are likely to host 2022 World Cup qualification matches. This means the Hub’s crown jewel might not be available for their games; a waste if they draw a top Asian team like South Korea or Japan.

The national footballers have long grumbled that they don’t feel like they have home-ground advantage when playing at the National Stadium. One Lion, who has played in both the old and current incarnations of the venue, said: “The Sports Hub is massive and, of course, I feel immense pride when I play there.

“But I must say it hasn’t got the magical feel of the old stadium.”

That magic, he notes, comes from Singaporeans filling seats and making the venue come alive; something they cannot do if there are no regular sports events in the first place.

More has to be done so that football and other sports can truly call the National Stadium home. And ensure that the term does not remain just a catchphrase on a banner.

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Ronaldo could face ex-team United in ICC S'pore

David Lee

In the space of nine months, five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo could be set for his third reunion with his former club Manchester United.

After their Champions League meetings late last year, the latest encounter could take place when the International Champions Cup (ICC) swings by Singapore in July.

This year's ICC in Singapore is set

to take place at the National Stadium over the July 19-21 weekend and will feature four teams – one more than in the last two years – and two games instead of the previous three.

Sources tell The Straits Times that Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur are all but confirmed for the visit. United will play two games in Perth on July 13 and 17 first, while Spurs will announce their tour of Asia next week.

When ST was at White Hart Lane last month, Tottenham manager

Mauricio Pochettino said: "We are looking to try... It is an option we like a lot and we would love to go. I think the percentage is high to be (in Asia) and meet you there."

It is understood that negotiations are ongoing to add Italy's Juventus and Inter Milan to the line-up.

The first edition in 2017 saw Chelsea, Bayern Munich and Inter play at the National Stadium. Last year, it was Arsenal, Paris Saint-Germain and Atletico Madrid.

Although the fixtures will only be

confirmed on March 27, the new arrangement means the four teams do not need to take a break between matches and the weekend scheduling should attract more fans to the National Stadium.

Alan Chua, a 35-year-old businessman who supports United and idolises Ronaldo, said: "I went to watch United beat a Singapore selection side 8-1 at the old National Stadium as a teenager in 2001.

"It would be a dream come true if both the Red Devils and Ronaldo

come back this year."

While Ronaldo has never played here, he visited in 2013 and 2017. Tottenham were last here in 1995, when Singapore beat them 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw, while Juventus beat a Singapore selection side 5-0 in the first football match held at the new National Stadium in 2014.

James Walton, sports business group leader at Deloitte Singapore and South-east Asia, said: "Realistically, the two EPL clubs that can really sell out the National Stadium are Manchester United and Liverpool. United would be far and away the biggest draw and a real coup for the ICC if they can get them here.

"The ICC format varies from loca-

tion to location. Having four teams instead of three, with some of the names on the table, is quite interesting. In previous years, there was always one game with a slightly weaker attendance, and it is usually the one without an EPL team.

"Hopefully, if we can have an exciting EPL team in each game, I believe both games will see significant attendances. One fewer game need not be a bad thing."

A spokesman for organisers Relevant could only confirm that the ICC matches here will take place in July and more information will be announced next month.

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School sports

SSP UNVEILS NEW SCHOLARSHIP

Up to 24 students with good conduct, sports results, potential will get the EW Barker award

David Lee

In the hope of continuing to attract the best sports talent, the Singapore Sports School (SSP) launched the EW Barker Scholarship yesterday.

Announced by guest of honour and Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the SSP's 15th Anniversary Celebrations Cum Awards Night, the EW Barker Scholarship will be awarded every year to as many as 24 student-athletes with exemplary conduct, outstanding sport results and the potential to become high-performing athletes.

Mr Tharman, who is also Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, said the late Mr Barker was "the champion for sports in Cabinet for many years" and drove the construction of the old National Stadium.

The former law minister was also a talented sportsman, and helmed the Singapore National Olympic Council from 1970 to 1990.

Mr Tharman added: "I look forward to the recipients of the scholarship being inspired by the life of Eddie Barker, to develop yourself to the fullest, and do your best for Singapore."

Up to five student-athletes per secondary school level and up to two per International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme level will receive the scholarship.

The EW Barker Scholarship stems from the \$35 million EW Barker Endowment, which has been supported by Temasek Foundation Nurtures since 2011.

While the quantum was not disclosed, Temasek Foundation Nurtures will provide full subsidy of school fees over the EW Barker Scholarship tenure of up to two

years. EW Barker Scholars are expected to contribute back to society by planning and performing community service work.

The SSP has identified 18 prospective recipients for the scholarship this year, including Raeka Ee, a national Under-17 netballer, and national shooter Shirlene Hew.

The 16-year-old Raeka said: "Mr Barker was instrumental in the development of Singapore sports... To even be a prospect of this scholarship makes me feel very honoured as it is one of high prestige, and it pushes me to want to do better on and off the netball court."

Shirlene, also 16, said: "Knowing that Mr Barker excelled in both his sports and studies and contributed a great deal to what Singapore is today, I am even more motivated each day to achieve my targets."

"I am aiming for the SEA Games this year and in 2021, as well as the 2022 Commonwealth and Asian Games. In giving back to society, I will be volunteering at a local soup kitchen whenever I can."

Last night, Mr Tharman also pre-



sented sports achievement awards to alumni who continue to win medals for Singapore, and launched a commemorative book titled The Champion's Way.

Alumni who received the Outstanding Sports Achievement Award (Alumni) included silat world champions Sheik Farhan and Sheik Ferdous Sheik Alau'ddin, Asiad gold medallist sailor Cecilia Low, and Commonwealth Games double gold shooter Martina Veloso.

Also, four students – Koen Pang, Siti Khadijah, Muhammad Jaris Goh and Crystal Wong – received the Moo Soon Chong Outstanding Student-Athlete Award.

davidlee@sph.com.sg

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

The Singapore Sports School aimed high from the start, gave its students the courage to dream big, and has achieved more than we could have expected in 15 years. If so much was achieved in 15 years, just imagine what more we can do in the future.



DPM THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM, addressing SSP students.

From left: Shirlene Hew (shooting), Shan Anandan (track), Raeka Ee (netball) and Clydi Chan (swimming) are four of 18 student-athletes identified by the Singapore Sports School as prospective recipients of EW Barker Scholarship this year. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Coach's pep talk to final player ensures RI's 5-0 win

Laura Chia

His team were leading 4-0 in a best-of-five tie, and had already successfully defended their Schools National B Division boys' tennis title yesterday.

Playing in the final match at the Ministry of Education (Evans Road) courts, Raffles Institution (RI) vice-captain Andre Keh found himself trailing against Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road)'s Aaron Toh after he lost the first set 6-3.

But the 16-year-old picked himself up after a pep talk by coach Weber Oh, and won the match 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 to complete RI's 5-0 thrashing of ACS (Barker), which followed their 3-2 win over Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) in last year's final.

Oh, who has been coaching RI for 22 years, said: "I expected him to win comfortably so I was watching the doubles matches.

"Then someone told me Andre was losing. I walked back and told him to relax because the rest were all winning so we didn't need him to win."

A tired-looking Andre told The Straits Times after the prize presentation that his coach's pep talk helped him calm down.

The Year 4 student said: "I was nervous. There were too many people around supporting me. But coach told me there's no pressure and to play the way I normally play. That calmed me down and I played much better after that."

RI took the lead through 16-year-old Aneish Sawney who comfortably beat ACS (Barker) captain Benjamin Oates 6-1, 6-0. Ahmad Naqib doubled RI's lead with a 6-1, 6-1 win over Jared Goh before Gareth Ong and Pierre Chng scored the winning point for the defending champions with a 6-0, 6-4 victory over Aidan Lim and Keaen Lim.

Jay Tan and Ryan Loo then made it 4-0 for RI with a 6-1, 6-2 victory over Sameel Sinnathuray and Luke Eng, before Andre won.

RI coach Oh attributed their victory to the boys' strong physical and mental states.

The 48-year-old said: "We're definitely very happy, the boys worked very hard.

"Physically, I push them quite hard and they don't get cramps or get tired easily.

"Also, we worked a lot on their mental strength. We made sure they're able to take pressure and know how to control their emotions so that if they're down, they don't get angry and so on."

While ACS (Barker) coach Simon Tan was disappointed with the result, he was proud of his students for reaching their first B Division final since 2016.

"Our preliminary round was very tough because we had all the stronger teams (like last year's finalists ACS (Independent)) in our group.

"The boys worked hard and did well to get themselves here. To me, that's already a big achievement and I'm very proud of them."

In the B girls' final, Methodist Girls' School also retained their title, beating Nanyang Girls' High School 4-1. They won by the same score against Raffles Girls' School last year.

claura@sph.com.sg



Andre Keh (left) had a nervy start to his singles match, losing the first set 6-3 before regaining his composure and claiming the next two sets 6-2, 6-2 to secure a 5-0 sweep for RI. Aneish Sawney (below) had comfortably won his match to give RI their opening point. ST PHOTOS: KELVIN CHNG



FOUR-DIGIT DRAW

Feb 13 2019

FIRST ♦ 5829
SECOND ♦ 7390
THIRD ♦ 3129

STARTERS

3974 4118 4271
6157 6457 6563
6760 7538 8233
8461

CONSOLATIONS

0789 2709 2795
2840 3830 4218
7376 8140 9012
9639

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Fri, 15 Feb 2019				
UE Europe	Lazio	Sevilla	1.55am	LW*
UE Europe	Rapid Vienna	Inter	1.55am	LW*
UE Europe	BATE Borisov	Arsenal	1.55am	LW*
UE Europe	Sporting	Villarreal	4.00am	LW*
UE Europe	Glasgow Celtic	Valencia	4.00am	LW*
UE Europe	Zurich	Napoli	4.00am	LW*
UE Europe	Malmo	Chelsea	4.00am	LW*

LW* : Telecast not available at Livewire(Singapore Pools)
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TOTO

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PSG forward Kylian Mbappe slotting past Manchester United custodian David de Gea for his team's second goal in the Champions League last-16, first-leg tie at Old Trafford on Tuesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

OLE'S 'REALITY CHECK' AS UNITED SEE THE GAP

Solskjaer says they have 'mountain to climb' after being outclassed by PSG in first leg

LONDON • For around 20 minutes at Old Trafford on Tuesday night, it felt like the Champions League glory days were back for Manchester United.

The capacity 74,000 crowd was in full voice, United were attacking Paris Saint-Germain down the flanks with speed and aggression and their opponents looked shaky.

That feeling lasted until the French champions began to get a grip on the game and, by the end of

the night, a 2-0 win for PSG in the last-16, first-leg clash served only to highlight the gulf that remains between this United team and the European elite.

"It's a reality check, you can see the strength they have," United's caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said after they lost to two quick-fire second-half goals from Presnel Kimpembe and Kylian Mbappe.

"They had the momentum after the first goal and controlled the

game. You could see we hadn't played at this level for a while and we will have to learn.

"That's the level we want to get to. We've been talking about top four (Premier League), but we also want to be at the top (in Europe)."

The Norwegian has finally tasted his first defeat since taking over 12 games ago in December.

But while United were outclassed technically and outwitted tactically, it could also be said that they were not helped by referee Daniele Orsato, who arguably should have sent off Kimpembe for a second bookable offence before his goal.

Instead, United midfielder Paul

Pogba saw red in the 89th minute after receiving a contentious second yellow card, in a match which Orsato dished out 10 yellows in total.

United also lost forwards Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard to muscle injuries and replacements Alexis Sanchez and Juan Mata failed to step up.

In the absence of Martial and Lingard, United had little pace and dynamism and lost the high press they used so successfully early on.

PSG had to cope without the injured Neymar and Edinson Cavani, yet remained a threat throughout.

That is the kind of strength in depth United will need to build if

they are to return to being the kind of force in Europe that they were under former boss Alex Ferguson.

PSG's quality was in full display and coach Thomas Tuchel also had his tactics spot on.

The defeat is United's first by a margin of more than a goal at home in European competition.

Solskjaer insisted, however, that the loss will not wreck the momentum United have built up in the Premier League and their confidence ahead of the FA Cup fifth-round tie against Chelsea on Monday.

"No, not at all because at this club we have to bounce back. The Champions League is always going to be difficult, but our bread and butter is the (domestic) league so (I'm) not afraid of that," he said.

"When we go to Paris, we'll give it a go. It is a difficult mountain to climb, but not impossible. Mountains are there to be climbed."

Only once since the 2010-11 season have United won a Champions League knockout game and, with Pogba suspended, the odds are stacked against that changing in the French capital on March 6.

THE GUARDIAN, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Talking points

POGBA GOES MISSING

Paul Pogba had led the Manchester United revival with eight goals and five assists since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was hired as caretaker manager in December.

The stage was set for the Frenchman to reaffirm his place among the world's top players on Tuesday, but instead the midfielder produced an oddly diffident performance that recalled the dark days of the Jose Mourinho era.

The 25-year-old made only 31 completed passes, his fewest in a match under Solskjaer.

In a fittingly downbeat coda, Pogba was sent off just before full-time, catching Dani Alves for a second booking that rules him out of the return leg on March 6.

REALITY BITES FOR OLE

Solskjaer's Midas touch finally wore off a little as the flaws that plagued United under his predecessor, Mourinho, returned to bite the interim boss.

Since arriving to replace Mourinho, the Norwegian had masterminded such a remarkable revival that United headed into Tuesday's game on the back of 10 wins in 11 unbeaten matches in all competitions.

But a host of defensive mistakes and a lack of creativity in midfield showed that the team lacked quality against the top sides in crucial areas.

Paris Saint-Germain duly exploited sloppy defending and United's flat attacking play to seize control.

SPEED KILLS

No Neymar? No Edinson Cavani? No problem for PSG, as Kylian Mbappe rose to the occasion with a blistering display of his electric pace and predatory finishing.

Brazil forward Neymar is out for 10 weeks with a broken metatarsal while Uruguay striker Cavani was sidelined after suffering a hip problem last weekend.

Fortunately for PSG, France forward Mbappe, who has 23 goals in 27 games this season, was simply unstoppable.

United defenders Eric Bailly and Victor Lindelof were brutally exposed by Mbappe's searing pace as he raced clear to meet Angel di Maria's cross with a clinical finish and delivered the killer blow in the 60th minute.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Coach tells Zaniolo to stay focused despite brace

ROME • Roma teenager Nicolo Zaniolo has been told not to get ahead of himself after he became the youngest Italian to score twice in a Champions League match as they beat visiting Porto 2-1 in their last-16, first-leg clash on Tuesday.

Roma coach Eusebio di Francesco sent out the warning after the 19-year-old scored his brace for the Italian Serie A side in six second-half minutes at the Stadio Olimpico.

The midfielder gave Roma a comfortable advantage before Porto

substitute Adrian Lopez responded with an away goal.

"It's right for him to be lauded, he has done well," di Francesco said in a post-match news conference.

"The praises are right, but without excess and with caution. I told him to remain focused and to always play with his head.

"He is on a path of development that is beyond expectations; the matches he doesn't play well in are also a motive for growth."

Di Francesco was pleased with his side's performance, particularly

in the second half, despite them conceding what could be a crucial goal for Porto with 10 minutes left.

"We grew into the game and used the ball better, the central midfielders were better with the quality of their play," he added after Edin Dzeko struck the post in an uneventful first period.

"The two teams were looking at and studying each other. We hit the post in the first half too, it was good. In the second half, we had more determination in the final third.

"It was one of our best perfor-

mances from the perspective of feeling like a team."

Zaniolo, who has become a fan favourite since arriving from Inter Milan in exchange for Radja Nainggolan last summer, could not hide his delight after the match.

The youngster, who has five goals and two assists in 22 appearances in all competitions this season, was also given an ovation by an ecstatic home crowd who see him as the heir to club legend Francesco Totti.

"It's an incredible night, I'm speechless and never would have

expected such a thing," Zaniolo told Sky Sport Italia.

"But we've got the second leg coming up, we shouldn't have conceded the goal."

Porto coach Sergio Conceicao believes the tie remains finely poised ahead of the return leg in Portugal on March 6.

"At the start, it was balanced, then when we tried to be more incisive, we conceded," he said.

"But we still have a 50-50 chance, just like before the game."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS



2

Before Nicolo Zaniolo's brace, the youngest to score two or more in the Champions League was Raul who, at 18, hit a hat-trick for Real Madrid against Ferencvarosi in 1995.

Europe increasingly Chelsea's priority

PARIS • The Europa League might not be top of Chelsea's priorities this season but, in current circumstances, today's last-32, first-leg clash at Malmo takes on extra importance for Maurizio Sarri's side.

The Italian's days in charge at Stamford Bridge could be numbered after Sunday's humiliating 6-0 Premier League defeat at Manchester City, their heaviest loss in 28 years and also their fourth consecutive away defeat.

But Sarri is still there for now as the London club continue a gruelling run of fixtures – the two legs of the tie against Malmo come either side of the FA Cup fifth-round

clash with Manchester United. Another meeting with City in the League Cup final follows.

"It's difficult to accept such a heavy defeat, but we have a lot of matches coming up to lift our heads and give us hope for good results at the end of this season," N'Golo Kante said on the Chelsea website.

The Blues breezed through their group despite Sarri regularly leaving out his leading players, and he is likely to rotate again in Sweden.

With this being the close season in Sweden, Malmo have not played a competitive game since the end of the group stage in December.

For Chelsea and their London ri-

vals Arsenal, United's recent resurgence in the league increases the need to keep going in the Europa League – winning the final in May could be the London sides' best chance of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Unai Emery's Arsenal are in Bary-saw to play Bate Borisov. The Belarusian champions, who won the last 13 league titles but lost home and away to Chelsea in the group phase, should not be a match for the Gunners. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MALMO V CHELSEA
Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214, tomorrow, 4am

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL Malaysia Dragons v CLS Knights Indonesia (StarHub Ch202, 8.30pm).

FOOTBALL

Uefa Europa League Last 32, 1st leg: Bate v Arsenal (Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214), Lazio v Sevilla (Ch112 & Ch213), Rapid Vienna v Inter (Ch113 & Ch215) – tomorrow, 1.50am. Malmo v Chelsea (Ch110 & Ch214), Celtic v Valencia (Ch112 & Ch213), FC Zurich v Napoli (Ch113), Sporting v Villarreal (Ch215) – tomorrow, 3.55am.

GOLF

LPGA Tour Women's Australian Open

Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 10am).
European Tour World Super 6 Perth Day 1 (StarHub Ch204, 1pm).

TENNIS

ATP Rotterdam Open Day 4, last 16: Session 1 (6pm) & 2 (Friday, 2.30am) – StarHub Ch201.

TOMORROW

BASKETBALL

ABL Zhuhai Wolf Warriors v Alab Pilipinas (StarHub Ch202, 8pm).

FOOTBALL

English FA Cup 5th rd: QPR v Watford

(Singtel TV Ch111, Saturday, 3.40am).
Spanish LaLiga Eibar v Getafe (StarHub Ch213, Saturday, 3.55am).

GOLF

LPGA Tour Women's Australian Open Day 2 (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 10am).
European Tour World Super 6 Perth Day 2 (StarHub Ch204, 1pm).

TENNIS

ATP Rotterdam Open Day 5, q-finals: Session 1 (7.30pm) & 2 (Saturday, 2.30am) – StarHub Ch201.

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

SPORT

Gordon Banks (1937-2019)

A 'KEEPER
YOU COULD
ALWAYS
BANK ONPele leads tributes for World Cup winner
who is remembered for his super save in 1970

LONDON • Pele has said that Gordon Banks' legendary save in the 1970 World Cup bound the two men together in a lasting friendship as he paid tribute to the former England goalkeeper who died aged 81 on Tuesday.

The Brazilian legend said even now he cannot believe how Banks managed to scoop away the header in Brazil's 1-0 group-stage win in Guadalajara's Estadio Jalisco.

"The save was one of the best I have ever seen – in real life and in all the thousands of games I have watched since," Pele, 78, said on Facebook. "And I couldn't believe what I saw. Even now when I watch it, I can't believe it. I can't believe how he moved so far, so fast."

"So I am glad he saved my header – because that act was the start of a friendship between us that I will always treasure."

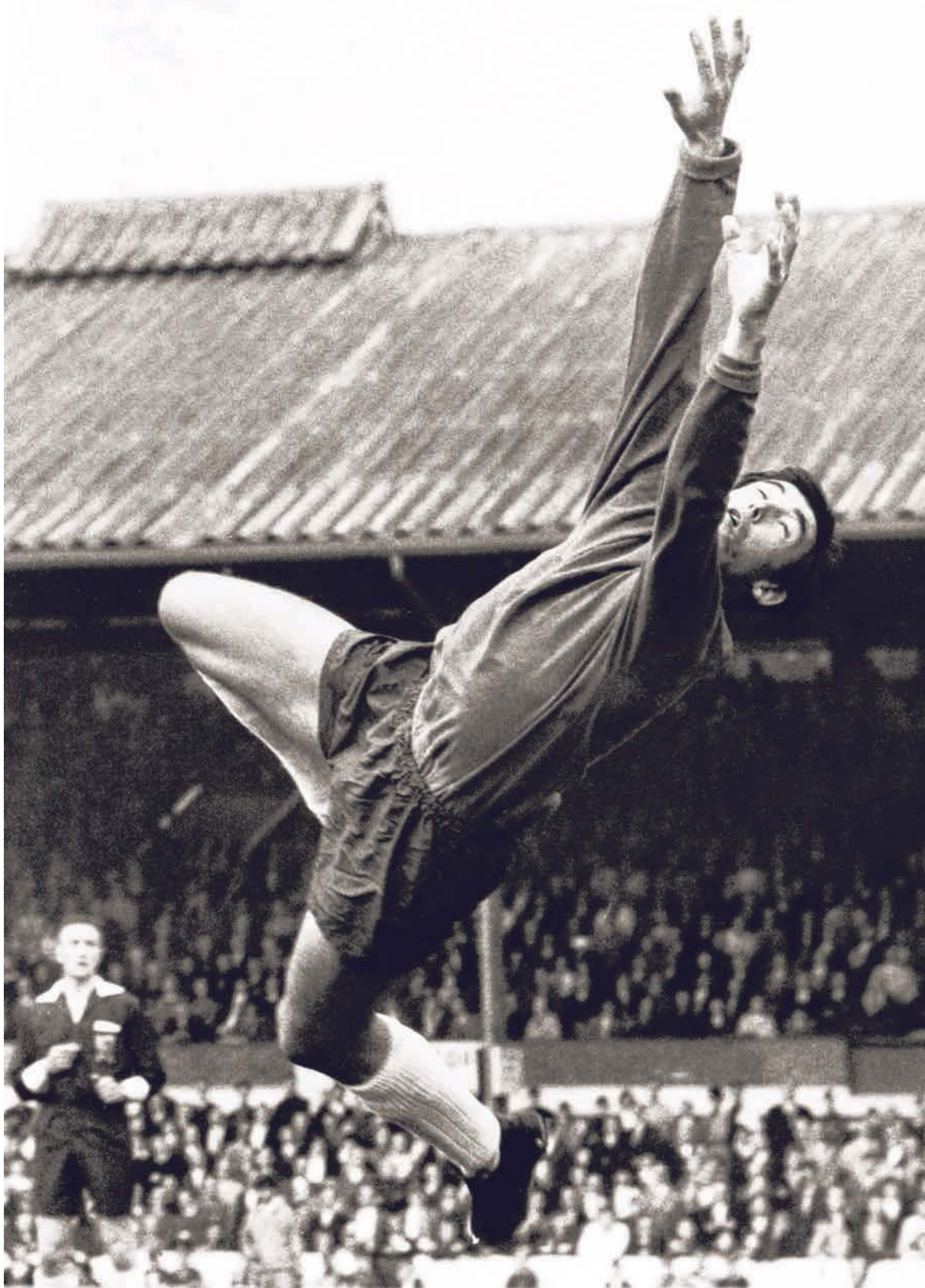
"Rest in peace, my friend. Yes, you were a goalkeeper with magic. But you were also so much more. You were a fine human being."

Bobby Charlton, the driving force of England's 1966 World Cup-winning team, paid his own tribute to Banks, saying he was "proud to call him a teammate".

"Obviously, we shared that great day in 1966, but it was more than that," he said. "Even though I was on the pitch and have seen it many times since, I still don't know how he saved that header from Pele."

In his playing days, Banks was, in short, the ideal goalkeeper for any age. Calm but ever alert, organising his defenders, watching his angles, plucking the ball out of the air, anticipating what a forward with the ball at his feet might do next, his qualities were beyond dispute.

For a while, as the 60s bled into the 70s, he was accepted as the finest goalkeeper in the world. He took over that distinction from Rus-



Gordon Banks in full flight for Stoke during an English top-flight match in 1969. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

sian giant Lev Yashin and handed it on to Dino Zoff, the eternal Italian.

Unlike Yashin, who retired at 40, and Zoff, who played in a World Cup final at 40 and a European Cup final at 41, Banks suffered the premature end of his career when a car accident cost him the sight of one eye at 34.

There was another difference, too. Yashin played for Dynamo Moscow, Zoff for Juventus. Banks played for Leicester and Stoke, and was never in line for the kind of club honours that were virtually guaranteed to the other two.

But it was Banks whose presence in the opposing goal made it much less likely the other team were going to score that day.

In the 1966 final, he conceded twice, first after Ray Wilson's poor headed clearance and then to a disintegrating defensive wall. But crucially there were saves – notably from a 25-yard snap shot by West Germany's Uwe Seeler just before half-time – that preserved the platform on which England could construct their 4-2 extra-time victory.

In Mexico four years later, it was his absence that made the crucial difference. An upset stomach kept him out of the quarter-final against West Germany, in which a nervous Peter Bonetti's misjudgments contributed to England's elimination.

Off the field, Banks was pleasant and approachable in a manner that belonged to his time.

Coming at a time when not one of the six English teams competing for the four Champions League places have an Englishman as their No. 1 or No. 2 goalkeeper, Banks' death reminds us of a time when he could be followed into the England jersey by Peter Shilton, Ray Clemence and David Seaman.

But mostly it encourages us to remember the afternoon when he and the greatest player of all time brought the best out of each other in the Mexican sunshine, two men from the working classes of different continents sharing a moment in which they played the game like angels, and in which Banks achieved immortality.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE GUARDIAN

SportsWorld

Scholes wins first
game as manager

LONDON • Former Manchester United star Paul Scholes made the perfect start to his football managerial career as Oldham thrashed Yeovil 4-1 in their League Two clash on Tuesday.

Scholes is taking his first steps in management after agreeing to coach the club he supported as a boy. The 44-year-old was officially unveiled on Monday and, 24 hours later, he was able to celebrate his first victory with the fourth-tier team.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Cardiff still seeking
Sala fee clarification

LONDON • Cardiff City chairman Mehmet Dalman has said the club will pay the £15 million (\$26.2 million) transfer fee to Nantes for Emiliano Sala if they are "contractually obliged".

After signing for Cardiff last month, Sala was travelling there from French club Nantes when his plane crashed in the English Channel. His body was recovered from the wreckage last week.

British media reported that Cardiff have been unwilling to pay the transfer fee, despite a demand from Nantes. Dalman confirmed that Nantes are threatening legal action, but the Welsh club are still seeking clarification on the issue.

REUTERS

Woods picks three
for Presidents Cup

MELBOURNE • First-time US Presidents Cup captain Tiger Woods on Tuesday named the experienced Fred Couples, Steve Stricker and Zach Johnson as three of his assistants for the showdown against the International team in Melbourne later this year.

The 14-time golf Major champion tapped former captains Couples and Stricker, while injecting new blood to the leadership team in the shape of the former Open Championship and Masters winner Johnson for the Dec 9-15 event.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A GREAT 'KEEPER, A FINE HUMAN

So I am glad he saved my header – because that act was the start of a friendship between us that I will always treasure. Rest in peace, my friend. Yes, you were a goalkeeper with magic. But you were also so much more. You were a fine human being.



PELE, the Brazilian legend who till today is still astounded at how Banks managed to save his header in England's 1-0 loss in their 1970 World Cup group game.

Obituaries

FOR BOOKINGS AND ENQUIRIES, call 1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

"but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." *Isaiah 40:31*



Regina Ling Seow Ying

Age: 56

Was called home to the Lord on 12 February 2019. Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Sisters & Brother-in-law:

Janet Ling & Ho Nee Soon

Florence Ling

Brother & Sister-in-law:

Eric Ling & Jay

Nieces & Nephew:

Georgia Ho, Chelsea Ho and Mischa Pitti Ling

And all relatives and friends.

Wake at Singapore Casket Level 3, Sapphire Hall, 131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737.

Nightly services will be held at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Saturday 16 February 2019 at 9.05am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 10.05am.



LOKE YEW KWANG

Age: 61

was called home to be with the Lord on 12 February 2019 leaving behind loved ones.

Brothers:

Loke Ah Weng, Loke Yew Fatt, Lenny Loke

Sisters-in-law:

Lee Yoke Sim, Ng Mei Yoke

Sisters:

Loke Oi Wah, Loke Wai Heng, Loke Oi Kum

Nephews:

Loke Cheok Mun, Leo Fong, Edwin Ng, Loke Zhuoxin

Nieces:

Ellen Ng, Loke Shu Hui, Janet Fong

Wake is held at 19A Jalan Membina,

Singapore 164019. Tel: 90400623.

Cortege leaves on 15 February 2019 at 8.45am for funeral service at Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 thereafter for cremation at 9.25am.

12th Anniversary

TEO BENG SUAN
Departed 14 Feb 2007

Deep in our hearts,
you will always stay,
loved and missed everyday

ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS
John & four loving daughters
Yingxiao, Meixiao, Xixiao, Qingxiao

Mr. & Mrs. Ong Fiang Suan

Phyllis Chua Hock Tay & Wally T. G. Ong
04.09.1923-14.02.1999
19.08.1920-20.03.2013
In Our Hearts, Always.



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SINGAPORE CONNECTION

Singer Na Ying once recorded an album here

D6



I love the way we order food at a hawker centre and that our hawker centres provide a variety of hawker fare from different ethnic groups.

Jean Heng, 25

Pledge your support for Singapore's Hawker Culture at www.oursgheritage.sg



ST'S OSCAR PICKS

The Straits Times predicts the winners and gives its take on what and who should win at this year's Academy Awards



John Lui
Film Correspondent

With just under two weeks to go before Oscars night, grouses are growing.

Triggering the traditionalists is how films on the Netflix platform, such as the drama *Roma*, have made a splash on the awards. This will only hasten the demise of cinemas, say detractors.

With its 10 nominations, the film based on writer-director Alfonso Cuarón's childhood in Mexico is tied with period comedy *The Favourite* for the title of most nominated film this year.

In Hollywood, social media has lit up over the decision to move four of the less well-known awards, including Cinematography and Best Film Editing, to commercial breaks to keep the show under three hours.

But for now, let us put the spotlight where it belongs – on the fine films and individuals who have a shot at Oscar glory.

johnlui@sph.com.sg

Best Picture



Nominees

- Black Panther
- BlacKkKlansman
- Bohemian Rhapsody
- The Favourite
- Green Book
- Roma
- A Star Is Born
- Vice



Will win: Green Book
Should win: Black Panther

By winning the Producers Guild of America Award last month, the biopic *Green Book* has a 70 per cent chance to also win Best Picture at the Oscars.

The story of how a white driver-bodyguard (played by Viggo Mortensen) and a black musician (Mahershala Ali, both above) bonded during a tour of the Deep

South appealed to voters because of its optimism about race relations.

The Marvel superhero movie *Black Panther* (left) should win because it is a more joyous and ambitious film that also happens to indirectly touch on racial issues. Director Ryan Coogler and his team not only created a vibrant new offshoot of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but also delivered a powerful story that lacked for nothing in visual excitement.

Lead Actor

Nominees

- Christian Bale (*Vice*)
- Bradley Cooper (*A Star Is Born*)
- Willem Dafoe (*At Eternity's Gate*)
- Rami Malek (*Bohemian Rhapsody*)
- Viggo Mortensen (*Green Book*)

Will win: Malek
Should win: Malek

Bale did the thing he is famous for to play former vice-president Dick Cheney in the biopic *Vice* – he changed his body, but instead of starving himself, as he did for drama *The Machinist* (2004) and boxing biopic *The Fighter* (2010), he ate till he was as portly as Cheney himself. He won a Supporting Actor Oscar for his work in *The Fighter*, but it is likely he will get only a nod this time because the film itself failed to gain much heat.

The film that did great at the box office – more than US\$800 million (S\$1.08 billion) worldwide so far – is the musical biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Malek (right) did not have to starve nor stuff himself to play Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury, but he turned in a sensitive performance liked by both critics and audiences.



PHOTOS: 20TH CENTURY FOX, SHAW ORGANISATION, THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

Lead Actress



Nominees

- Yalitza Aparicio (*Roma*)
- Glenn Close (*The Wife*)
- Olivia Colman (*The Favourite*)
- Lady Gaga (*A Star Is Born*)
- Melissa McCarthy (*Can You Ever Forgive Me?*)

Will win: Close
Should win: Colman

Acting categories favour veterans, especially those with repeat nominations. That eliminates first-time actress Aparicio, who played domestic helper Cleo in *Roma*, and rock star Lady Gaga, who starred opposite Bradley Cooper in the musical *A Star Is Born*.

McCarthy's portrayal of forger Lee Israel in the biopic *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* is much-liked and critically lauded, but this year, the actress, known for her comedic parts, is up against stalwarts held in esteem by their peers.

British actress Colman's turn as the self-hating Queen Anne (left) bowled over critics, including this reviewer. Close was superb in *The Wife* (right), playing a woman whose work has been stolen by her author husband for decades, but it did not hold a candle to Colman's work in range and theatricality. But she has seven nominations and no wins, and this is the year the American actress is expected to pick up her first win.

CONTINUED
on D2

ST's Oscar Picks

Supporting Actor



- Nominees**
- Mahershala Ali (Green Book)
 - Adam Driver (BlackKkKlansman)
 - Sam Elliott (A Star Is Born)
 - Richard E. Grant (Can You Ever Forgive Me?)
 - Sam Rockwell (Vice)

Will win: Ali
Should win: Ali

It is a weak field this year. There is no fresh-faced break-out star, no grizzled television character actor finally making it in the movies, no 1980s idol making a comeback, only a group of decent but unremarkable performances from men who have been drifting in and out of the spotlight for years.

The sentimental favourite is much-loved and highly respected British actor Grant, a professional known for work in cult favourites, such as *Withnail And I* (1987) and *How To Get Ahead In Advertising* (1989), but never recognised by the academy until now, with his first nomination. In *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*, he is Jack, the supportive foil to Melissa McCarthy's eccentric Lee, a forger, but that effort is not strong enough to unseat Ali.

Green Book is a favourite for its message and Ali's portrayal of the uptight but gifted musician Don Shirley (above left, with Viggo Mortensen) has the depth that the academy and this reviewer like.

Director



- Nominees**
- Spike Lee (BlackKkKlansman)
 - Pawel Pawlikowski (Cold War)
 - Yorgos Lanthimos (The Favourite)
 - Alfonso Cuarón (Roma)
 - Adam McKay (Vice)

Will win: Cuarón
Should win: Cuarón

This is an interesting year, statistically, for this category. There is a strong relationship between a movie winning Best Picture and its director winning Best Director. It makes sense – a well-made picture is well made because of a good director.

But if *Green Book* wins Best Picture, as pundits say it will, it will be only the fifth instance since the Academy Awards started in 1929 that the director of the Best Picture – in this case Peter Farrelly – has gone un-nominated for Best Director.

The last time it happened was for *Argo* (2012), a Best Picture winner directed by Ben Affleck. Best Director honours that year went to Taiwanese director Lee Ang for fantasy adventure *The Life Of Pi* (2012).

All the smart money is on Cuarón for *Roma*, a tender account of his middle-class childhood in Mexico City. It is not only a wonderful film, but also has the stuff voters and critics like – a personal story, a sustained mood of nostalgia and great performances.

Original Screenplay

- Nominees**
- The Favourite (Deborah Davis and Tony McNamara)
 - First Reformed (Paul Schrader)
 - Green Book (Nick Vallelonga, Brian Currie and Peter Farrelly)
 - Roma (Alfonso Cuarón)
 - Vice (Adam McKay)

Will win: The Favourite
Should win: The Favourite

Screenplays are judged by what is on the page, not factors such as how moved audiences are by the film.

The favourite with film writers seems to be, aptly, *The Favourite*. First penned by British writer Deborah Davis, then massaged by Australian playwright Tony McNamara and Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos for about a decade, it is filled with potty-mouthed cursing, witty retorts and full-blooded characters who feel fresh and relevant despite the 18th-century setting of the film.

Supporting Actress



- Nominees**
- Amy Adams (Vice)
 - Marina de Távira (Roma)
 - Regina King (If Beale Street Could Talk)
 - Emma Stone (The Favourite)
 - Rachel Weisz (The Favourite)

Will win: King
Should win: Weisz

This category has been thrown for a loop this year because Claire Foy (the Neil Armstrong biopic *First Man*) and Emily Blunt (the horror work *A Quiet Place*) failed to be nominated.

Blunt would have been a hot favourite here, but now it looks as if King (right), who plays a mother in romantic drama *If Beale Street Could Talk*, is the bookmaker's pick.

Admittedly, a win for Weisz would be a long shot, but the actress, who has one Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her work in romantic thriller *The Constant Gardener* (2005), is a force of nature as Lady Sarah (above), the lover and confidante of Olivia Colman's Queen Anne, and the real power behind the throne.



PHOTOS: 20TH CENTURY FOX, EPA-EFE, NETFLIX, REUTERS, SHAW ORGANISATION, UIP

Adapted Screenplay

- Nominees**
- The Ballad Of Buster Scruggs (Joel and Ethan Coen)
 - BlackKkKlansman (Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, Kevin Willmott and Spike Lee)
 - Can You Ever Forgive Me? (Nicole Holofcener and Jeff Whitty)
 - If Beale Street Could Talk (Barry Jenkins)
 - A Star Is Born (Eric Roth, Bradley Cooper and Will Fetters)



Will win: BlackKkKlansman
Should win: The Ballad Of Buster Scruggs

If *Beale Street Could Talk* is supposedly tied with the comedy *BlackKkKlansman* (above right) in the lead in this category.

But this reviewer has not seen the romantic drama and has instead enjoyed *The Ballad Of Buster Scruggs* (right), a comedic Western filled with visual and dialogue gags that the Coen siblings so adeptly put on the page.

But voters are likely to feel that jokey material, especially when split over six standalone stories, carries less weight than a single arc. For that reason, the sharp and politically pointed *BlackKkKlansman* will take the prize.



MORE STORIES
on D3 and D5

• The Academy Awards ceremony is held on Feb 24 (Feb 25 morning, Singapore time).

Powerful women and their vulnerabilities

Greek film-maker Yorgos Lanthimos was drawn to make *The Favourite* – about the women around Queen Anne in 18th-century England – because of the characters’ complexity

Alison de Souza
In Los Angeles

It may be set in 18th-century England, but *The Favourite* – about two female courtiers vying for the affections of capricious Queen Anne – is no fusty period drama.

Instead, the film – a top Oscar contender that opens today – feels strangely contemporary in its tale of political intrigue, hidden love and loneliness at the top.

And director Yorgos Lanthimos achieved that through subtle tweaks in the dialogue, music and one memorably odd dance scene.

“We found different ways and elements to infuse the film with a modern texture,” he says at a screening in Los Angeles last month.

“The first and most important thing was that when writing the screenplay, we used language that felt modern, even though it was inspired by how we think people spoke at the time.

“And then with things like costume design, we wanted to keep the shapes of the period, but use a lot of contemporary materials, from leather and vintage denim to plastic and 3D-printed accessories.

“It is quite subtle – you don’t necessarily see that immediately, but it gives it a texture and does inform the film visually.”

Some of those creative gambles seem to have paid off as the film is up for 10 awards at the upcoming Oscars.

Tying with the Spanish-language drama *Roma* for the most nominations this year, it is in contention for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress for star Olivia Colman and Best Supporting Actress for Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz.

It won a leading seven awards at the recent British Academy Film Awards, including Baftas for Best Actress (Colman) and Best Supporting Actress (Weisz).

Lanthimos says the movie – which casts Colman as Queen Anne, Weisz as the Duchess of Marlborough and Stone as Abigail Masham, the latter’s ambitious cousin – was a labour of love that took him eight years to make.

The 45-year-old Greek film-maker – previously best known for the quirky dystopian allegory *The Lobster* (2015) – was captivated by the story of how Masham rises to power in the court of the mercurial monarch, becoming a potential threat to the influence of the duchess, the power behind the throne. The appeal for him was “that it was a true story – that at some point in time, these three women had such power”.



Another draw: “Their personal stories and what Queen Anne went through, and the fact that this very intimate story about these three women could showcase how much individuals can affect the lives of millions of other people.”

The female-centric storyline seems apt for a time when women’s issues are increasingly in the spotlight with the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements and the prominence of female politicians in recent years.

But Lanthimos says the current political climate had little bearing on why he put women in the foreground of his film.

“Eight years ago, nobody was even speaking about that. But for me, it was an instinctive thing, rather than me logically thinking we should make more films with women.”

That said, he was interested in part “because I wasn’t seeing many films that had women as protagonists, especially three women”.

He also felt compelled to portray the three central characters in all their Machiavellian, self-serving and yet relatable and vulnerable complexity.

“I thought from the beginning that we should make these characters as complex as possible, with so

many different shades of grey, just like in real life.”

“There’re all kinds of women just like there’re all kinds of men,” says Lanthimos, who is married to Greece-born French actress Ariane Labed, 34. “There are terrible people, wonderful people, loving, manipulative – it all exists, sometimes within the same person.”

In addition to being a political drama, the movie is an unlikely love story too – although the director is not fond of categorising cinema in this manner.

“This is definitely about love and it’s a very intimate story, but at the same time, it speaks about politics,

war and many other things,” says Lanthimos.

“I never like to define films as being about one thing – I hope they can be about many things.

“That’s what I’m looking for when I decide if a story interests me – if it’s more than one thing, if you can see it from different angles, and if different people can watch it and think about different things depending on who they are.”

stlife@sph.com.sg

● *The Favourite* opens in Singapore today.



Up for 10 awards at the upcoming Oscars, *The Favourite* – directed by Yorgos Lanthimos (left) – stars Rachel Weisz (above left) and Olivia Colman (above right).
PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Wickedly funny period piece

REVIEW / DRAMA-COMEDY

THE FAVOURITE (R21)

120 minutes/Opens today/★★★★★

The story: It is the early 18th century and Queen Anne (Olivia Colman) is, as usual, crippled by illness and grieving over 17 children, all stillborn, miscarried or dead in infancy. Her lover and adviser is Sarah Churchill (Rachel Weisz), from whom she derives both confidence and advice about Britain’s expensive fight with other European nations in the War of the Spanish Succession. Into the household comes Abigail Hill (Emma Stone), a woman from a decayed branch of the English aristocracy, who is taken in as a scullery maid. The film is nominated for 10 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress for Colman and Best Supporting Actress for Stone and Weisz.

John Lui

The greatest danger this wonderfully arranged and wickedly funny film faced was over-stuffing – period pieces about European royals tend to pack in court intrigue, naval battles, generals and name-dropping.

But the usual pomp and ceremony is absent.

Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos lacks the insecurity that compels him to throw grand halls, costumes and soldiers on the screen.

This is a film about two women fighting to manipulate a third for power. That there is a lesbian trian-

gle at its centre is a secondary but important element in the mix.

There is so much texture in every scene that, as in all the best films, one wishes for a rewind button to take it all in more than once. Not least because of the settings. Lanthimos plants his camera at a distance to capture the power plays in widescreen, so even as viewers see the body language in the game of winning the regent’s favour, they can drink in the finery at the edges.

While it has been said several times of different directors before, it is true here – Lanthimos lets the human body tell the story.

From the way Abigail is forced to take freezing baths as part of her induction into the household, to how Sarah exudes a sense of threat with her chest and arms while blasting pheasants with her rifle, to Queen Anne’s struggles to get her bulk out of her bed, sobbing because of gout, the film-maker grounds this period story in the here and now, an approach that makes everything immediate, relatable and satisfying.

To keep the foul-tempered queen happy, everyone in her circle wears a false face, a ploy that wreaks havoc with Anne’s mental well-being, a fact that Colman conveys with heartbreaking sensitivity.

The London-based Lanthimos loves masks.

In the psychological horror work *The Killing Of A Sacred Deer* (2017), a boy who is not quite what he seems inflicts pain on a suburban family



Actress Emma Stone (above) in *The Favourite*. PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

who are themselves hiding a secret. In his breakthrough, the surreal, horrific Greek-language *Dogtooth* (2009), the parents of a cultish family create an alternate reality for their imprisoned children.

In tone, *The Favourite* most resembles his alternate-reality comedy *The Lobster* (2015), set in a world in which single persons are

given a deadline to find a mate, after which they are turned into an animal of their choosing. The desperate unmarried don elaborate false fronts to find a match, and the gaps between what is real and what is theatre gives the director plenty of room for pitch-black comedy.

That embrace of characters horrified, yet pleased, by whom they

have become shines through in *The Favourite*, despite it being the first feature not to have writing input from Lanthimos. The script, from Deborah Davis and Tony McNamara, earned a well-deserved Best Original Screenplay nod from the Academy for its seamless blend of indelicate, often raunchy, comedy, pathos and melodrama.

Top10Movies

SINGAPORE

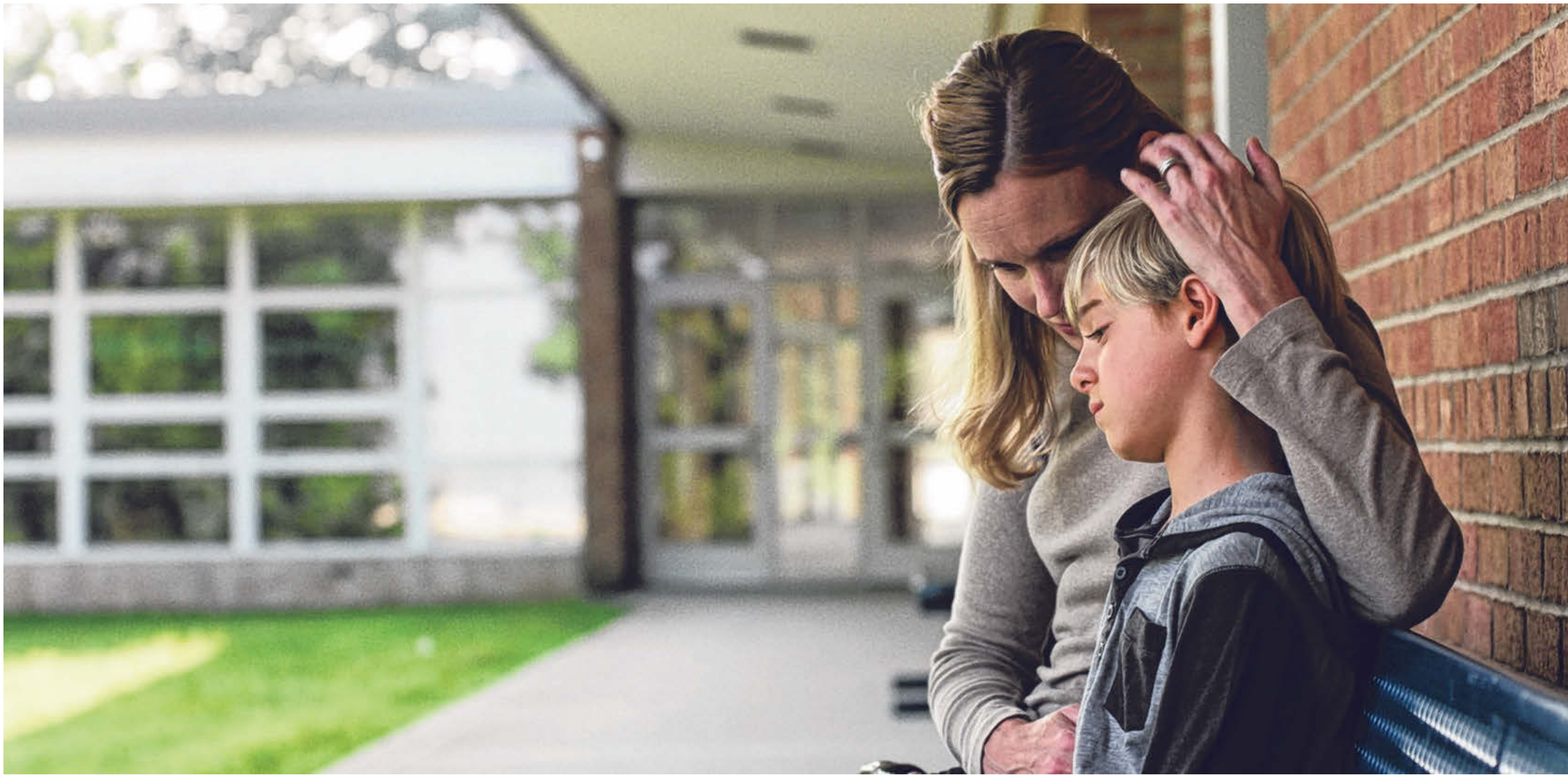
1. (-) *Alita: Battle Angel*
2. (1) *How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World*
3. (-) *The Knight Of Shadows: Between Yin And Yang*
4. (-) *The New King Of Comedy*
5. (-) *Killer Not Stupid*
6. (-) *The Lego Movie 2*
7. (-) *Integrity*
8. (-) *Pegasus*
9. (5) *Green Book*
10. (2) *Glass*

● Information from Cinematograph Film Exhibitors Association

UNITED STATES

1. (-) *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part*
2. (-) *What Men Want*
3. (-) *Cold Pursuit*
4. (2) *The Upside*
5. (1) *Glass*
6. (-) *The Prodigy*
7. (6) *Green Book*
8. (4) *Aquaman*
9. (5) *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*
10. (3) *Miss Bala*

● Information from boxofficemojo.com



Cheryl Allison and David Schallipp in award-winning film *No Letting Go*. Many of the scenes and the dialogue in the film are taken from producer Randi Silverman's experiences with her own son. PHOTO: SINGAPORE MENTAL HEALTH FILM FESTIVAL

Depicting the silent plight of mental-health patients

Film producer says *No Letting Go* is an accurate portrayal as her family coped with their son, who grew up with bipolar disorder

John Lui
Film Correspondent

In the family drama *No Letting Go* (2015), an anxious boy grows into a teen prone to violent outbursts. His father offers tough love, while his brother blames the parents for not doing enough to help him be “normal”.

Finally, when things reach a breaking point, the family seeks professional help and receives a heartbreaking diagnosis: Their son has bipolar disorder, a condition that needs lifelong management.

For its accuracy in depicting how the condition affects families, the independent drama has won awards at festivals around the world, in particular, those centred

on the theme of mental health.

The film's authenticity comes in large part from its co-writer and producer, Randi Silverman.

“My middle son from a young age struggled with anxiety and depression, but we really didn't know what that was,” says Silverman, 53. She spoke to *The Straits Times* on the telephone from the state of New York.

No Letting Go is the opening film of the inaugural Singapore Mental Health Film Festival, which will be held from Feb 21 to 24. On its line-up are 11 features and short films, as well as panel discussions and workshops.

Now an advocate for families coping with a loved one with mental issues, Silverman says she and her husband were for a long time puzzled and left distraught by their son's erratic behaviour.

“By that time, years had gone by and he had become very sick. By the time we started to learn about how common mental-health disorders were, I wondered why we did not know that we needed to get help

BOOK IT / SINGAPORE MENTAL HEALTH FILM FESTIVAL

WHERE: Screenings at The Projector, Level 5 Golden Mile Tower, 6001 Beach Road

WHEN: Feb 21 to 24, various times

ADMISSION: \$18 for single screening, \$51 for a three-film pack. Workshops are free with registration

INFO: smhff.com

sooner,” she says.

Mental disorders are little discussed because of the shame and stigma associated with notions of insanity, she adds.

Many of the scenes and the dialogue in the film are taken from her own experiences, including the stages of denial that she and her husband went through. In her time as an advocate, she has learnt that her family's pattern of behaviour is fairly typical.

“We are, as a society, in denial. It is typical for the dad to want to fix things and for the mother to wonder if they had done anything wrong,” she says, adding that sometimes, it is the mother who is trying to offer tough love, while the father blames himself for their child's condition.

In the film, as in real life, the son receives top-notch private medical care as the family can afford it.

She says her family was fortunate enough to have the resources to seek help, but the right help did not come easily despite their ability to pay. She can imagine how much

harder it is for those who are less well-off, coping with a family member who needs professional help.

There is a happy coda to the film, she adds. Now, after time spent in therapy and with medication, her 22-year-old son is doing well.

“He lives on his own, takes care of himself and has friends. The treatment has helped him tremendously,” she says.

Ms Cheryl Tan, the festival director, says her team worked with the Institute of Mental Health's Community Health Assessment Team (Chat) to curate the panel discussions. Chat is a national outreach and mental health-check programme with a focus on helping young persons.

“We have a mix of experts on the panels and persons in recovery,” says Ms Tan, 32.

“We want to take people through the journey of feeling what it is like to be faced with issues of mental health. Film is a wonderful medium for cutting through the clutter.”

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Hartono well cast as object of female lust

REVIEW / ROMANTIC COMEDY

WHEN GHOST MEETS ZOMBIE (PG13)

107 minutes/Opens today/★★★★☆

The story: Some time in the past, a tsunami threatens a Thai village and a group of men saves everyone, at the cost of their own lives. In the present day, some Singapore beauty pageant contestants visit the statues of the heroes. Zhen Zhen (Ferlyn G) suspects something is amiss with the statue of Pong (Nathan Hartono) and, when an accident causes her to lose her life, she discovers that he is a corpse, reanimated.

John Lui

It is a clever premise for a body-swap romance as described by director and co-writer Han Yew Kwang – a man without a soul is possessed by a woman who is a soul without a body.

But everything, as they say, hinges on execution. That promising premise has been, pardon the pun, fleshed out into a film with a lot in common with the zombie played by musician-turned-actor Hartono.

It moves stiffly, wanders about searching for direction and falls flat often. But the film is saved by funny scenes that exploit something other than Mediacorp star cameos or catchphrases for punchlines.

After an over-stuffed prelude, the



Nathan Hartono (right, with Ferlyn G) does the standard zombie stiff-armed shuffle, as well as Magic Mike-style male stripper scenes. PHOTO: GOLDEN VILLAGE

story moves from Thailand to Singapore. Here, it emerges that Zhen Zhen is a ghost because of unfinished business. Because she cannot move objects, manipulating the corpse of the former Pong like a mecha suit comes in handy.

Hartono makes his leading-man debut in a role where he does the standard zombie stiff-armed shuffle, with some dancing thrown in. He is also the object of female lust in a couple of Magic Mike-style (2012) male stripper scenes and, in that regard, he is well cast.

Along the way, Zhen Zhen finds that what she wants is not what she needs. These needs have to do with her relationship with her mother (Fann Wong) and her friends Bai Bai, a mortuary cosmetologist (Jeseca Liu), and Lai Lai, a fitness instructor (Jeremy Chan).

The villain is a Taoist priest and demon slayer played by Gurmit Singh, who exhibits a precise sense of physical comedy. Determined to destroy Pong, he makes exorcism at-

tacks out of the blue. Singh's priest is no simple buffoon, but a sympathetic character, a man trying to clean up a mistake.

Director Han has built a reputation on accessible independent comedies (18 Grams Of Love, 2007; Rubbers, 2014), which tend to be character-driven, not joke-driven. He prefers to make a few strong moments of humour work rather than crack an endless slew of weak jokes.

Here, in what might be his most commercial project yet, he has opted to play it safe.

The weirdness of the gender body-swap is ignored, for example, so there are no bits about a woman discovering the awkwardness of male protuberances or the psychological toll such a change might exact on her mind.

Han is guilty of inserting crowd-pleasing bits and cameos that distract from the main couple-in-love thread, but his attention to detail and love of the genre is, thankfully, still intact.

Kidman is memorable as raging cop

REVIEW / THRILLER

DESTROYER (M18)

123 minutes/Opens today/★★★★☆

The story: Detective Erin Bell (Nicole Kidman) is called to a crime scene – an unidentified man has been shot. She says she knows the victim, realising that the consequences of a job she performed years ago must be reckoned with today. Back then, with fellow cop Chris (Sebastian Stan), she had infiltrated a gang. Even as she is trying to reconcile with her estranged daughter, she has to tie up loose ends before they do her and her daughter harm.

John Lui

As it turns out, Kidman had always been in the running for the role of damaged detective Bell.

It was not a case of the part going to, say, a character actress such as Melissa Leo or CCH Pounder, both of whom have played no-nonsense cops in films and TV, then swooping them when a star showed interest in the role.

The creative team, this reviewer guesses, decided to age her for the scenes set in the present day, rather than hire another actress to play the younger Bell or to “youthify” an older actress like Leo or Pounder.

The weirdness of seeing a pros-



A prosthetics-covered Nicole Kidman plays a tortured detective, settling scores with the men who wronged her, in *Destroyer*. PHOTO: SHAW ORGANISATION

thetics-covered Kidman looking as if she had been living rough for decades is left behind quickly, thankfully.

This is a plot-driven thriller, so without giving too much away, it is enough to note that the way Bell carries herself as a crooked cop brings to mind other compromised Los Angeles Police Department officers, such as the men of *The Shield* TV show (2002 to 2008) or the noir thriller *L.A. Confidential* (1997).

Those cops are smooth hypocrites, but not Bell. She snarls and barges her way through in the present-day sequences, driven by pain and rage. She is a volcano on the verge of erupting; it is fun to watch a female version of Nicolas Cage in *Bad Lieutenant: Port Of Call New Orleans* (2009), but it gets exhausting after a while.

Director Karyn Kusama sees the story as a psychological horror piece about a woman tortured, mentally and physically by a sin left to fester. She revisits old places, but in

an interesting twist, she is not there to atone for her past but to erase it, with violence always an option.

Tough, smart to get what they want have always been a Kusama forte, whose breakthrough was the boxer drama *Girlfight* (2000), a film that made Michelle Rodriguez a star. Her dark comedy *Jennifer's Body* (2009), starring Megan Fox at the height of her fame, was not well-received commercially or critically, but has lately been given a more positive appraisal.

Destroyer, like *Jennifer's Body*, has a woman settling scores with the men who wronged her. While at times gimmicky – see Kidman's make-up and the flashback-driven story – this combination of tense cop thriller and revenge flick does work.

Her Bell is a bold and interesting choice, making this mix of unhappy mother and human bulldozer one of the more memorable central characters in cinema today.

Love in a bygone era



Polish director Pawel Pawlikowski believes the old-fashioned storytelling in the film Cold War will draw audiences

Alison de Souza
In Los Angeles

A starkly beautiful black-and-white period drama, Cold War has “artsy” written all over it.

It has been a favourite among critics, scooping Best Director honours at last year’s Cannes Film Festival and is now up for three Oscars: Best Foreign Language Film, Best Director and Best Cinematography.

But Polish director and co-writer Pawel Pawlikowski thinks his story will appeal to a broader constituency than the arthouse crowd: diehard romantics.

Set in Poland, France, Germany and Yugoslavia from the 1940s to 1960s, against the backdrop of the Cold War, the film tracks the turbulent love affair between a young singer and a musical director who meet in the aftermath of World War II.

The Polish-language film will screen at Golden Village Paya Lebar tomorrow and Saturday.

Speaking at a screening in Los Angeles in December, Pawlikowski describes his protagonists as “two misguided characters who don’t

really fit together socially or temperamentally, and history plays its tricks on them”.

“But in the end, they realise they have nobody but each other and it’s kind of sublime,” he says. “I feel uplifted by such endings too.”

The film-maker – who won the Best Foreign Film Academy Award with drama Ida (2013) – wanted this movie to recall a bygone era where romance did not play out on smartphone and computer screens. “This is part of the reason I went back to Poland to make it and also went back in time,” says the 61-year-old, who has lived and worked in Britain for most his life.

“It’s out of this urge to tell these stories which kind of transcend time and where emotional life is not ruled by the digital world, but happens for real and has huge consequences.”

Moviegoers respond to his old-fashioned storytelling and filmmaking, he believes.

This was also true with Ida, his film about a young woman discovering a dark family secret from the years of the German occupation – the first Best Foreign Film Oscar winner from Poland.

“The reaction of audiences to Ida and to this shows there is a real craving for that. And not just with the story, but also the way you make films – the idea of hand-making films in a non-industrial way also seems to have a good impact on audiences.”

“Because it’s not a film where you can feel the division of labour – ‘this is the script, photography, this is the music’. Everything was brought

together in a very amateurish, old-fashioned way.”

The movie is also a deeply personal one inspired by the director’s own parents, whom he describes as “the most interesting dramatic characters I’ve ever come across”.

They were “both strong, wonderful people but, as a couple, a never-ending disaster”, says Pawlikowski, who has two children by his late first wife and is now married to Polish model Malgosia Bela, 41.

As a cinematic interpretation of his parents’ relationship, Cold War is “pretty close in the mechanics – the way they meet and (the fact) he’s 10 years older and seems like an authority, and she’s this hot-headed young woman”, he says of lovers Zula (Joanna Kulig) and Wiktor (Tomasz Kot).

“And they read and misread each other, they separate, they reunite abroad and discover they’re not quite what they remembered or imagined about each other.”

“All that happened to my parents – splitting up and getting back together, marrying other people, leaving the country, dumping other people. Much more messy than here,” he says with a laugh.

This all played out over 40 years for his mother and father, rather than the compressed 15-year timeline in the film.

It, ultimately, worked out for his parents, though.

“At the end of it all, they were too tired to fight and were both quite ill.”

“And they were the most touching, loving couple you can imagine. They were holding hands and the whole world was kind of passing

them by and they didn’t care. They had nobody, but each other.”

“So it was a great love story at the end, but it didn’t look like it at first.”

stlife@sph.com.sg

• Cold War screens at Golden Village Paya Lebar tomorrow and Saturday.

Cold War stars Joanna Kulig and Tomasz Kot (both above).

PHOTO: ANTICIPATE PICTURES

Haunting affair

REVIEW / DRAMA

COLD WAR (M18)

88 minutes/Opens tomorrow/★★★★★

The story: In Poland, just after World War II, a musician and a singer fall in love. Their desires are thwarted by the state as well as debates over whether exile is preferable to repression at home. The story begins after the war, when Zula (Joanna Kulig), a young singer with a troubled past, comes under the guidance of Wiktor (Tomasz Kot), a composer and arranger given the job of making Polish folk music great again. The film is nominated in three categories (Best Foreign Language, Best Director, Best Cinematography) at the Academy Awards.

John Lui

This is a rare film in which everything gels so perfectly, the whole would collapse if one element were missing.

There is the cool monochrome look; the music that moves from folk songs to sultry Parisian jazz; the sparse dialogue paired with long takes; and, not least, the crisp yet sensitive editing that brings everything home in just under 90 minutes.

Polish director Pawel Pawlikowski tells the story of a doomed love affair with a deep understanding of theme, variation and repetition.

Like the central song, sung in rustic style in the first act, then reborn as an aching torch song which might have flowed from the pen of Elvis Costello or the horn of Chet Baker, episodes in the lives of Zula and Wiktor play out, each marked by the same haunting motif, musically and emotionally.

They are not a couple, but part of a triangle, with the state forming the third apex. The cultural apparatus Kaczmarek, played with smarmy self-satisfaction by Borys Szyc, is the hand that smotherers, but also feeds – the three are locked in a dance of respect, obligation and sexual jealousy.

Britain-based Pawlikowski used to teach Singapore film-maker Anthony Chen (Ilo Ilo, 2013) at the National Film and Television School in Buckinghamshire, England. Perhaps not coincidentally, both are expatriates who have spent a large part of their lives in Britain, whose important works have been nostalgic remembrances of the home country.

In Ilo Ilo, Chen recalls a childhood under the care of his Filipino domestic helper, while in Cold War, Pawlikowski’s story – inspired by the lives of his parents – has characters tortured by a dilemma: freedom in exile or staying home and working under the thumbs of those with a completely utilitarian view of the arts.

As in Pawlikowski’s last feature, Ida (2013), also set in a Poland under Russian control, Cold War expresses how difficult it is to choose the truth of one’s life. For Wiktor and Zula, as this sorrowful but beautifully rendered film illustrates, the choice exacts a terrible price.

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Na Ying has a soft spot for Singapore

The veteran Chinese singer spent three months here recording her award-winning album *Sad And Romantic* years ago

Jan Lee

It may have been more than 19 years since veteran Chinese singer Na Ying last staged a concert in Singapore, but the 51-year-old says the city will always hold a special place in her heart.

She spent three months here recording her album *Sad And Romantic* – produced by prolific Singaporean songwriters and twin brothers Lee Shih Shiong and Lee Wai Shiong – which won her Best Mandarin Female Singer at 2001's Golden Melody Awards.

“Sisong and Weisong wanted me to have a good, quiet place to record the album, so I stayed here for three months.

“I haven’t had a chance to perform in Singapore for a long time, but it’s dear to me,” says Na in an e-mail interview with The Straits Times. Her last solo concert here was in 1999 at Suntec City Mall.

Her Singaporean fans are in luck, as Na promises that her concert – to be held next Saturday at Resorts World Convention Centre – will feature all her classics.

She says: “All the songs that I know I can’t exclude – my fans’ favourites – I’ll definitely sing.”

Na, known for songs such as *Conquer* (1998) and *Just A Dream* (1999), enjoyed a resurgence of fame when she appeared as a

mentor and judge on the Chinese reality singing competition, *The Voice Of China*, in 2012.

She stayed with the show for four seasons and two more after it was renamed *Sing! China*.

She quit the show in 2017.

Speaking of her time on the show, she says: “I’ve been a professional singer for about 30 years and never thought that I’d feel so much responsibility being a mentor or that I’d have a chance to meet so many talented young singers from around the world.

“I don’t think being with these young people necessarily changed my style of singing. But it definitely made me more attuned to recent sounds and musical styles and I understand them better.”

Na, whose last full-length album, *So What*, was released in 2011, says plans for a new album are under way.

“I think my fans might feel that songs which are a continuation of my musical style so far are good songs.

“Personally, I’d like to reflect my growth, my new understanding of life, in my music.”

She also thanked Singapore fans for the concern shown to her when she was recently plagued with false rumours of ill health on social media.

The singer says: “The Internet can be malicious and I don’t always



Singer Na Ying has appeared as a judge on reality singing competition *Sing! China*. PHOTO: BIZ TRENDS

feel like defending myself from (the rumours) because the best way to prove myself is to be on stage singing.

“I want to assure my fans in Singapore that I’m healthy and fine and I can’t wait to see everyone.”

janlee@sph.com.sg

BOOK IT / NA YING NA WORLD TOUR CONCERT

WHERE: Resorts World Ballroom, Resorts World Convention Centre, 8 Sentosa Gateway

WHEN: Feb 23, 8pm

ADMISSION: \$48 to \$288 from Sistic (go to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555)

Yoyo Sham is in full control of her music



Hong Kong singer-songwriter Yoyo Sham flits easily among English, Mandarin and Cantonese in *Nothing Is Under Control*. PHOTOS: ESPLANADE – THEATRES ON THE BAY, FEELING GOOD MUSIC, EAS MUSIC

INDIE POP
NOTHING IS UNDER CONTROL
Yoyo Sham
Feeling Good Music
★★★★☆

POP
L.O.V.E
Eason And The Duo Band
Universal Music Hong Kong
★★★★☆

Boon Chan

The idea that nothing is under control can be a scary one, but it can also be a liberating epiphany.

Accordingly, there is a free-and-easy vibe on Hong Kong singer-songwriter Yoyo Sham’s follow-up to her acclaimed debut, *Here* (2015).

Opening Cantonese track *Kai Chang Bai* (*Bon Voyage*) has an improvisational and whimsical feel, as if one were in an intimate jazz club as she addresses the audience: “There’s two more minutes, ladies and gentlemen/White clouds will drift overhead.”

She flits easily among Cantonese, Mandarin and English and from genre to genre, following where her muse leads her.

Scrambled Eggs Blues scrambles English and Mandarin in a number torched by her bluesy vocals: “Scrambled me, scrambled you/ Hear my scrambled blues.”

Mandarin duet *Yi Miao* (*Just Another Day*) features feted Hong Kong singer Eason Chan – for whom Sham started out as a backup singer.

The poignant ballad was written after she witnessed a fatal car accident a few years ago – “Forgive

me for leaving/Haven’t had time to return your love”.

She also appears on *L.O.V.E.*, an album credited to Eason And The Duo Band, as its genesis was during Chan’s Duo world tour from 2010 to 2012.

The idea was for everyone who was part of the tour – including the late singer-songwriter Ellen Loo, who played the guitar on it – to contribute to an album that would commemorate their time together.

Sham’s contribution is the English track *Run*, for which she wrote the music and lyrics and sings with Chan – an elegiac ballad (“Last night I had a dream/That I was on an endless run”) that would not be out of place on *Nothing Is Under Control*.

Mostly, though, the mood is more upbeat on the largely Cantonese album: a relaxed gathering of musician friends having a blast

jamming together.

Po Huai Wang (*We Zzzzid It*) is an energetic track with a context-setting rap: “Here we go again/On the train, on the same plane/Best friends we became.”

Inevitably, the collection feels a bit disparate, though it is all tied together by Chan’s reliable vocals.

BOOK IT / HUAYI 2019: IN: MUSIC / YOYO SHAM NOTHING IS UNDER CONTROL

WHERE: Esplanade Annexe Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive

WHEN: Feb 23, 8pm

ADMISSION: \$30 from www.esplanade.com or Sistic (go to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555)

Delightful piano take on Brahms’ songs

CLASSICAL
BRAHMS LIEDER
Carles & Sofia, Piano Duo
KNS Classical A/069
★★★★★

Chang Tou Liang

It might appear odd to encounter a recording of Johannes Brahms’ *Lieder* (German art songs) arranged for four hands on the piano.

But why not? In actual fact, much of the German composer’s orchestral music (all four symphonies, overtures and serenades), chamber music (quartets and quintets) and even his German Requiem exist in versions for piano four hands.

Thus, this selection of 18 songs, marvellously arranged by German

doctor-turned-composer Christoph Ewers comes across as wonderfully idiomatic.

Nothing sounds overblown or over-projected. The often simple melodic lines are lovingly preserved, while the rich accompaniment, so characteristic of Brahms, does not overwhelm.

There are some familiar numbers, including the tender *Cradle Song* (Op. 49 No. 4), *Wie Melodien Zieht Es Mir* (Op. 105 No. 1, famously quoted in the Second Violin Sonata) and the *Two Songs* for voice, viola and piano (Op. 91).

The autumnal *Four Serious Songs* (Op. 121) provide for a more sober but sublime conclusion.

The Catalan duo of Carles Lema and Sofia Cabruja are ever sensitive to details and nuances, and words are hardly missed in this delightful hour-long recital.

MusicCharts

APPLE MUSIC

1. (1) *7 Rings* – Ariana Grande
2. (2) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
3. (-) *Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored* – Ariana Grande
4. (5) *Sweet But Psycho* – Ava Max
5. (-) *Needy* – Ariana Grande
6. (4) *Without Me* – Halsey
7. (3) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
8. (-) *NASA* – Ariana Grande
9. (-) *Bloodline* – Ariana Grande
10. (7) *Dancing With A Stranger* – Sam Smith and Normani

• For the week of Feb 13 in Singapore

SPOTIFY

1. (1) *7 Rings* – Ariana Grande
2. (-) *Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored* – Ariana Grande
3. (7) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
4. (4) *I’m So Tired* – Lauv and Troye Sivan
5. (2) *Dancing With A Stranger* – Sam Smith and Normani
6. (5) *Way Back Home* – Shaun, Conor Maynard and Sam Feldt
7. (6) *Without Me* – Halsey
8. (3) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
9. (8) *Sweet But Psycho* – Ava Max
10. (-) *Bury A Friend* – Billie Eilish

• For the week ending Feb 13

BILLBOARD

1. (1) *7 Rings* – Ariana Grande
2. (8) *Happier* – Marshmello and Bastille
3. (2) *Without Me* – Halsey
4. (3) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
5. (5) *Sicko Mode* – Travis Scott
6. (7) *High Hopes* – Panic! At The Disco
7. (6) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
8. (4) *Middle Child* – J. Cole
9. (9) *Wow.* – Post Malone
10. (10) *Girls Like You* – Maroon 5 featuring Cardi B

• For the week of Feb 16.

• Information from Hit FM not available at press time

What's Good
LOOKING AT THE UPSIDE

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Read positive stories at our microsite [str.sg/stwhatsgood](https://www.str.sg/stwhatsgood)

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SPHmagazines



Singer Ariana Grande taps her personal tragedy for Thank U, Next. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REPUBLIC RECORDS

Still staying sassy through pain

Although Ariana Grande bares her soul in her latest album, the darkness never overwhelms

POP
THANK U, NEXT
Ariana Grande
Republic Records
★★★★☆

Anjali Raguraman

Ariana Grande might have had a rough 2018, but the tough experiences have provided fodder for one of her most raw but self-assured albums to date.

Her fifth album, named after the lead single and chart-topping Thank U, Next, was released in the wake of great personal tragedy – namely the death of Grande’s ex-boyfriend, rapper Mac Miller, and the subsequent messy and public break-up with her fiancé, comedian Pete Davidson.

While her struggles have been documented in the press, this is Grande taking charge of her narrative and dealing with it through music in the most spontaneous and honest way.

Released six months after Sweetener, which clinched Best Pop

Vocal Album at the recent Grammy Awards, Thank U, Next was reportedly completed in two weeks.

On it, she is not afraid to be vulnerable.

On Needy, which is about wanting to feel needed, she sings: “I admit that I’m a lil’ messed up/But I can hide it when I’m all dressed up.”

That candidness is a through line of the album, coming back again on Ghostin’, in which she admits: “I’m a girl with a whole lot of baggage.”

In response to a fan’s tweet, she says the song is about “feeling badly for the person you’re with (because) you love somebody else... feeling badly (because) he can tell he can’t compare”.

But it is also apparent who she is referencing.

“Yeah, look at you, boy, I invented you,” she sings, in a dig at her ex, Davidson, on the trap-laced number, In My Head, in which she

tussles with a person’s reality and the version she built of him in her head.

But even while dealing with her issues in an unflinching manner, like on Fake Smile, she still retains her signature sass – “If I’m hurt, I ain’t gon’ lie about it/Arms crossed with the attitude, lips pouted” – all over a catchy, vintage-soul sample.

It is credit to Grande that while she is coming from a place of pain, the darkness never overwhelms.

She still manages to be cheeky and flirty, like on Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored, a cheeky title in itself.

In lusting after someone who is taken, she has the perfect album closer because it is loud and clear, that despite the heartbreak, love and loss, Grande is moving on – and moving up.

anjali@sph.com.sg

Offbeat and back-to-basics rock

ROCK/PSYCHEDELIC/
ALTERNATIVE COUNTRY
TIP OF THE SPHERE
Cass McCombs
Anti-
★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE ROCK
SUNSHINE ROCK
Bob Mould
Merge
★★★★☆



In Tip Of The Sphere, singer-songwriter Cass McCombs reinterprets classic 1970s rock. PHOTOS: SILVIA GRAV, ANTI-, MERGE

overdriven guitars mixed with earworm melodies is not new, but the 58-year-old executes the tried-and-tested with class and style.

Unlike the darker tone of 2016’s Patch The Sky, inspired in part by tragedies like the death of his mother, the tone of the new songs is as the album title suggests.

Sunshine Rock is just as personal, but this time, Mould took inspiration from the German city of Berlin, where he has been spending time in the last three years.

“There’s a bright light, blinding white light/You’re like lightning across the sky/Please don’t leave me in total darkness/I’ll bring you with me into the sunshine rock,” he sings with typical fervour in the upbeat title track as orchestral strings swell in the background.

The lustre continues in Sunny Love Song (“If I write a sunny love song every day/I can shine so bright on you, so true”) and Camp Sunshine, a sweet reflection on happy times.

Mould tempers the effervescence with less lively tracks such as Irrational Poison and Sin King, but offers reassurances in dark times, most notably in Lost Faith: “Baby, we all lose faith in troubled times/You know I’m gonna be right here.”

Eddino Abdul Hadi

American singer-songwriter Cass McCombs has always been an enigma and Tip Of The Sphere, his ninth album, is no different.

The 11-track album, his first since 2016’s acclaimed Mangy Love, defies easy categorisation.

Two sprawling, psychedelic jams bookend the album and while there are plenty of reinterpretations of classic 1970s rock, the 41-year-old also delves into Americana, jazz and classical Indian music to carry his offbeat tales.

While the melodies might be economical, the tracks are subtly

intricate – you can barely hear the saxophones in the gentle, piano-led Absentee, for example, but it feels like an integral part of the mix, together with the swelling guitars and McCombs’ tender singing.

The musical vibes of the album might be chill overall, but his idiosyncratic lyrics certainly are not.

The seeming paradox of the title extends into the neologisms present in the meandering album closer, Rounder (“Were a radia gun-slung/Were a murdream boys room/On a slight of jadeself/Are you tied of drying, rounder?”)

Early single Sleeping Volcanoes, as he explains in a press statement, is inspired by “people passing one

another on the sidewalk unaware of the emotional volatility they are brushing past, like a sleeping volcano that could erupt at any moment”, while the spoken-word drone of American Canyon Sutra sees him ruminating on Walmarts, garbage dumps and “sacred American trash”.

Less oblique, musically and lyrically, is Sunshine Rock, the latest work from American punk and alternative rock pioneer Bob Mould.

In his 13th solo album, the Husker Du and Sugar frontman goes back to basics for his latest batch of songs.

His trademark brand of brash,



Singer Jessica Pratt unfurls the slow-burning magic of her third album in only 28 minutes. PHOTOS: MEXICAN SUMMER

Less is more on Quiet Signs

INDIE FOLK
QUIET SIGNS
Jessica Pratt
Mexican Summer
★★★★☆

Yeow Kai Chai

Spring cleaning done, you stare at the Everest of discarded clothes and wonder: Does this spark joy or kill joy instead? This conundrum, thankfully, does not apply to the richly minimalist music of Jessica Pratt.

The San Francisco-born, Los Angeles-based singer believes less is more – her third album, Quiet Signs, unfurls its slow-burning magic over nine tracks in only 28 minutes. Yet, the more time spent with it, the more one is spellbound.

In her confidently unharried style, one espies the influence of forebears such as Joni Mitchell and Sibylle Baier and, in its conspiratorial hush, someone like Janis Ian too.

This cool crispness is foiled by her child-like (some might say witchy) soprano, not as tremulous as Josephine Foster’s or outlandish as Joanna Newsom’s, but something more elusive and shyer and, therefore, eerier.

Miked low and woven into chamber-pop reverie, it can even sound muffled, distant.

At times, it is suspended, drifting with the dips and swells of woodwinds into an alternate Arcadia or purgatory, or both.

Crossing begins innocently enough as a bucolic ballad. “I’ve been singing along to try/To sing along,” she sings over buttery, seamless strums, before the ominous addendum changes the mood entirely: “And you stole my singing/And you say that you ought to be strong/poison all.”

The effect is dream-like, as if words as well as their attendant meanings are being recontextualised by the beseeching, circular melody.

The same peripatetic urge propels Fare Thee Well, ostensibly a goodbye letter to someone beloved, a paramour or a listener. “We come to tell the story’s end along in the wind/I’ve been keeping up again,” she confesses, as a flute winds through the subtly evolving tune, buffered by the guitar and organ.

“A seabird laughs alone in the dark,” comes a singer in a narrative imperilled by decoys and red herrings. “I’ve been years on the wrong side/And I used to see a cause and a call,” she confesses in the chorus.

She finds solace in a jazzier, more soulful nocturne.

In This Time Around, a lonesome horn keens in the background as she opens up about the ghosts that haunt: “This time round/Has it gone grey that my faith can’t hold out?” Her voice rings out in the cavernous night buttressed by simple acoustic strums.

Pratt plays off soft against hard as she navigates emotional pitfalls, gleaming light in darkness and vice versa.

In Silent Song, she addresses an unrequited love: “I long to stay with you/Or did I belong to my song? Here I’ll wonder, soldier on.”

Her voice, unexpectedly, drops a notch, sounding almost brusque – and the listener is jolted out of his lull.

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Telemad

Laws of love and scandals

A romance between an older woman and a younger man rules K-drama *Romance Is A Bonus Book* and Japanese drama *Queen* examines the fallout of attention-grabbing issues



Boon Chan

Upending the more conventional set-up, a recent crop of K-dramas has paired a younger man with an older woman.

Something In The Rain (2018) had Son Ye-jin as a woman in her 30s falling for her best friend's younger brother, played by Jung Hae-in. And in Encounter (2018), a free-spirited Park Bo-gum romances his boss, played by Song Hye-kyo.

The newest chapter is **Romance Is A Bonus Book**.

Kang Dan-yi (Lee Na-young), 37, plays a divorcee with a young daughter. She finds that the world has changed in the years that she stayed home to be a mother and wife, and her past glories as a copywriter count for naught.

Disheartened and desperate, she decides to downgrade her qualifications on paper and applies to be a temporary worker at a publishing company.

This is where an old dear friend of hers, Cha Eun-ho (Lee Jong-suk), 32, is the editor-in-chief. He has carried a torch for her all these years. Can a romance blossom between them, even as they keep the fact that they are besties under wraps at work?

The problem is that Eun-ho is so firmly in the friend zone and has



been so for so long, that it seems hard to move things forward.

Dan-yi sees him as a little brother, even taking it upon herself to teach him to drink alcohol when he turned 20 – and getting hopelessly drunk herself in the process.

Romance Is A Bonus Book marks Lee Na-young's return to the small screen after nine years (The Fugitive: Plan B, 2010), while Lee Jong-suk has had a string of recent successes, including romance drama Pinocchio (2014 to 2015) and fantasy thriller W (2016).

While there are moments of sweetness between them, the vibe between them is more friendly than fiery, which makes it kind of difficult to root for them as a couple.

Is it a case of mismatched big names a la Encounter?

Actually, Dan-yi has more chemistry with Wi Ha-joon (Something In The Rain), a freelance book designer who becomes her knight in shining

armour one rainy night. Except that Dan-yi says she is too old to believe in fairy tales and would rather write her own story.

Her mix of vulnerability and pluckiness makes her the most engaging character on the show.

The series is directed by Lee Jung-hyo, who previously helmed the older-woman-younger-man romance A Witch's Love (2014), and written by Jung Hyun-jung, whose calling card seems to be romances, with credits such as Discovery Of Love (2014) and I Love You (2008).

They mix a light-hearted tone with flashes of sadness and pain which, for now, make for pleasant enough, if not essential, viewing – like a fluffy beach read.

For those steering clear of romance around Valentine's Day, legal drama **Queen** could possibly serve as a distraction.

The full Japanese title translates to Lawyer Specialising In Scandal, which pithily sums up the premise here.

Yuko Takeuchi, fresh from the

title role in the crime drama Miss Sherlock (2018), plays lawyer Ko Himi.

She is part of a crisis management team which includes the sometimes ditsy Chie Yoda (Asami Mizukawa), pretty boy Shuji Fujieda (Taishi Nakagawa) and tech-savvy Seiko Mano (Yuki Saito).

The show grapples with attention-grabbing issues, from the pressures faced by a J-pop girl group to sexual harassment in a company. And it also drily notes how fickle public opinion can be, swaying this way and that with each turn of events.

But while the offbeat team can be mildly amusing – though not as much as the crackpots in J-drama Legal V (2018) – Queen never really comes to grips with the topics thrown out.

The episodes are too neatly wrapped up, though the promise of a larger mystery involving Himi could yet pay off.

bchan@sph.com.sg

VIEW IT / ROMANCE IS A BONUS BOOK

Netflix
★★★☆☆

QUEEN

Viu
★★★☆☆

In *Romance Is A Bonus Book*, Lee Jong-suk plays an editor-in-chief who has carried a torch for his older friend, a divorcee played by Lee Na-young (both above).
PHOTO: NETFLIX

Exclusively for subscribers of The Straits Times

Asian Masters cooking demonstration by chef Selamat Susanto

Asian Masters returns for its seventh edition from March 1, 2019 till Feb 29, 2020 and celebrates the best of Asian gastronomy.

The programme line-up includes a series of cooking demonstrations by renowned chefs from top Asian restaurants.



An exclusive session, hosted by The Straits Times senior food correspondent Wong Ah Yoke, will see Selamat Susanto, head chef of Asian casual-dining concept Fat Chap, cook two dishes: oven-baked barramundi marinated South-east Asian-style and klapertart (coconut custard with almond flakes and rum-soaked raisins).

A menu daydreamer with a curious palate inspired by the love of flavourful ingredients, the Indonesia-born chef's passion for cooking stems from his family traditions of preparing and sharing meals together.

The Straits Times is giving away 30 pairs of passes to this session on March 2 at 10am.

HOW TO WIN

1. Download the SPH Rewards app.
2. Look for the giveaway in the Rewards section.
3. Press the "JOIN" button and answer this question:

This cooking demonstration by chef Selamat Susanto and hosted by ST senior food correspondent Wong Ah Yoke is part of Asian Masters 2019. True or False?

The contest ends on Feb 22.
Terms and conditions apply.



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Grab tie-up, self-order printers for #BuySingLit

Olivia Ho

The third edition of the #BuySingLit campaign aims to get Singaporeans to buy local literature through a tie-up with ride-hailing app Grab, as well as a book fair that centres on locally-published Malay literature.

The industry-led movement will run over two weekends this year instead of one, from March 8 to 17. It will feature more than 50 programmes islandwide.

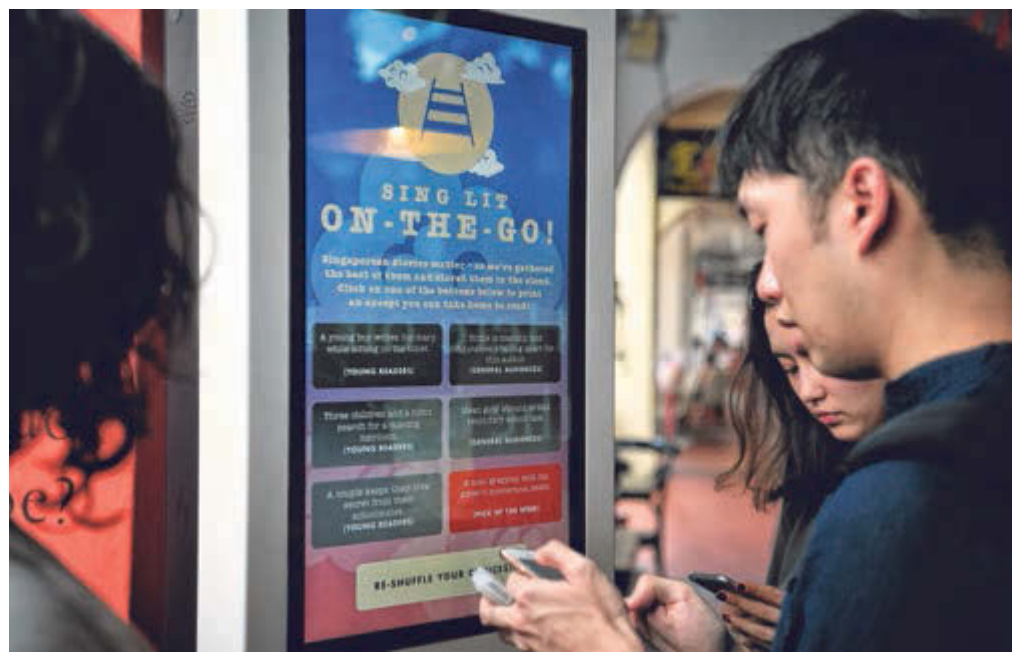
Singapore Book Council executive director William Phuan, who is on the #BuySingLit organising committee, said at the launch event yesterday that this year's movement aims to "showcase the local literature scene in unusual ways and reach beyond our current SingLit book lovers".

These methods include Grab SingLit by online retailer Localbooks.sg and Grab Singapore, in which Grab users can redeem some 8,000 books by Singapore writers using points from GrabRewards on the app, at about 50 points a book. It runs from March 8 to 31.

Localbooks.sg head of operations Callie Chong said it hopes to expose a larger audience to home-grown literature via GrabRewards' users.

Another project, called Sing Lit Cloud, organised by literary non-profit group Sing Lit Station, involves self-order machines with printers. These will be installed at Our Tampines Hub, Mapletree Business City and Library@Harbourfront.

The printers, which are inspired by a similar project by French publisher Short Edition, will dispense



A project called Sing Lit Cloud involves self-order machines (left) with printers that will dispense free bite-sized excerpts of Singapore books. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

free bite-sized excerpts of Singapore books by authors such as Catherine Lim, Gopal Baratham and Clarissa Goenawan.

Local publisher Pustaka Islamiyah will be organising Pesta Buku Melayu, Singapore's first book carnival that focuses on local Malay literature, at Wisma Geylang Serai from March 16 to 17.

It brings together four local Malay-language publishers and will feature programmes such as a children's book-writing competition, writing workshops and a poetry slam.

Pustaka Islamiyah director Syed Ali Semait expects the fair to draw about 5,000 people.

He said: "It's important for all the publishers to come together and

create a hub to build up the reading habits of the Malay community."

Other activities include an escape-room game at bookshop City Book Room, in which groups of participants have an hour to find clues based on a Chinese-language children's book hidden around the bookshop and escape. Bookstore owner Tan Wain Ching said: "Fun is important in educating people. Hopefully, the game will introduce people to more of our books."

Independent bookstore Books-Actually is holding a street party on March 16 and 17 outside its store in Yong Siak Street. Visitors can lunch with a local writer at neighbouring restaurant Cheng's or attend book clubs at ice-cream shop Creamier and cafe Forty Hands.

#BuySingLit coincides with the Textures literary festival at The Arts House from March 7 to 10, where programmes include exhibitions such as The Room Of Love And Loss, a gallery of photographs of objects significant to members of the literary community, and a performance of writer Alfian Sa'at's short-story collection Malay Sketches.

Last year, more than 31,000 people attended #BuySingLit events over three days. According to a survey by the organisers, more than 66 per cent of the participants said their interest in Singapore literature increased after attending the events.

For more information, go to singlit.sg

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



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CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.45 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (PG) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
1.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 4 (SC)
2.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC) (CA)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)
4.00 Rojak (PG) (SC)
4.30 Survivor 36 (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.30 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (PG) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
7.30 America's Got Talent: The Champions (PG) (V)/8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5
9.30 Talking Point 2018 (HD) (CA)
10.00 The Resident (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 NCIS 14 (HD) (PG13) (D) (Season Finale)
AM
12.00 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Lion Moms (PG) (D)
1.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
2.20 Hawaii Five-O 7 (PG13) (D)
3.10 Lethal Weapon (PG) (D)
4.10 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
4.40 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)/5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Golden Age Talentime (CC) (V)
7.00 Sidewalk Scientist (IE)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (CA)
8.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (CA)

9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Fruit, Veggies & Me 2 (CC) (IE) (Finale)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 JML Home Shopping (Infomercial)
1.00 News 8 At One
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Little Counsellor (HD) (S)
2.30 The Precedents (PG) (D)
3.30 Golden Melody (V)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 When Duty Calls (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (CA)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Fun With SINGnese (CC) (IE)
9.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight/10.30 Focus (CC) (CA)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG13) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)
1.00 Taste The World (IE)
2.00 Fiery Passion (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Unique Lodging (CC) (IE)
4.00 The Food Detectives (IE)
4.30 Working Golden Holidays (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Girl Who Sees Smells (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 World Food (CC) (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG13) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 World Food (CC) (IE)
AM
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.02 When We Play/11.00 News Now
PM
1.02 Champions For Change
2.00 News Now
4.02 When We Play

5.00 News Now
7.02 Champions For Change (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 Insight
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.02 Champions For Change
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
1.02 Insight
2.00 News Now
2.30 Asia Exposed
3.02 When We Play
4.00 News Now
4.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
5.02 Insight

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Anjaraipetti 5 (IE)
4.00 Priyasakhi (D)
4.30 Thedal – Star Search 2016 (HD) (V)
5.30 Mighty Raju Animation Series (S)
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (D)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam Varalaru (CC) (Cul)
7.30 Hands That Shaped The Nation: The Merdeka Generation (IE)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Kanavu Meipada 2 (CC) (IE)
10.00 Rowthiram (PG13) (CC) (D)
10.30 Nijangal (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 Maalai Maalai Vasantham (V)
11.30 Ethiroli 15 (HD) (CC) (CA)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (News) (R)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Tip The Mouse (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (P)
11.00 Mouk (P)
11.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
PM
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)
12.30 Teddies (P)

1.00 Coconut The Little Dragon (P)
1.30 Tip The Mouse (P)
2.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (P)
3.00 Mouk (P)
3.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (S)
4.30 Captain Flinn And The Pirate Dinosaurs (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Marcus Level (S)
6.00 The New Powerpuff Girls (C)
6.30 ExLosers 2 (D)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (CC) (S)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (CC) (C)
8.00 Turning Mecard (CC) (C)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (CC) (S)
9.00 ITTF World Tour – Grand Finals 2018 (Sports)
11.10 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

PM
4.00 Bibik-Bibikku (PG) (D)
5.00 Hilang Kasih Di Sarajevo (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 Supa Strikas (S)
6.30 Masak-Masak Ringan (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (News)
8.30 Sentuhan Harapan (PG) (CC) (IE)
9.30 Kultus (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Bingit (PG) (D)
11.30 Berita (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 18
7.35 Storage Wars: Texas 6
8.00 Storage Wars 10
8.30 Swamp People 8
9.30 Ancient Aliens 10
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 4
1.10 Swamp People 8
2.05 Pawn Stars 18
2.35 Storage Wars: Texas 6
3.00 Storage Wars 10
3.30 History Drama: Project Blue Book
5.20 Hunting Hitler 2
6.15 Swamp People 8
7.10 Pawn Stars 18
8.05 Storage Wars 11
9.00 Forged In Fire 5
9.55 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
10.50 History Drama: Knightfall
11.45 The Curse Of Oak Island 4

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Dance Moms 7
7.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
9.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
10.00 Growing Up Supermodel
11.00 Atlanta Plastic 2
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 7
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 The Lover In The Attic: A True Story
3.35 Married At First Sight Australia 4
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
7.00 This Time Next Year
8.00 Born This Way 2
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 Harry & Meghan: A Royal Romance

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.00 The Manchurian Candidate (NC16)
8.10 Backdraft
10.25 The Zookeeper's Wife (NC16)
PM
12.30 Action Point (NC16)
1.55 True Detective 3 (NC16)
2.55 Star Trek (2009)
5.00 La La Land/7.05 Thor
9.00 Valentine's Day
11.00 Crashing 3 (NC16)
11.30 High Maintenance 3 (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
7.10 Star Wars: Episode II – Attack Of The Clones
9.30 Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge Of The Sith
11.50 Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope
PM
1.55 Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back
4.00 Star Wars: Episode VI – Return Of The Jedi

6.10 Play Misty For Me
7.50 You Don't Know Jack (NC16)
10.00 Strike Back 6 (NC16)
11.00 Camera Obscura (M18)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
6.00 Alpha Beta (HD)
7.00 Signal (HD)
8.15 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
9.15 Dowry (HD)
10.15 Chinese Restaurant 2 (HD)
PM
12.15 Still Loving You (HD)
1.30 Signal (HD)
2.45 Back To Youth (HD)
4.15 The Way To Wellness (HD)
4.45 Still Loving You (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
8.00 Super Boys 2 (HD)
9.30 Fun Abroad (HD)
10.00 Noble Aspirations (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
6.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
7.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships 2019: Ladies' Free Skating
11.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
PM
12.00 Multi Sport: Fise World Series Highlights 2018: Edmonton
1.00 Tennis: Fed Cup By BNP Paribas 2019 First Round Czech Republic Vs Romania: Day 2 Rubber 4 & 5
5.00 Tennis: Deuce 2019
5.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
6.00 ATP 500 ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament: Day 4 Last 16 Session 1

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.00 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 31 Norwich City Vs Ipswich Town
9.00 Wrestling: Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)
9.30 Triathlon Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2018
10.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
PM
12.00 Basketball: Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Hong Kong Eastern Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas
2.00 Basketball: National Basketball League Round 18 New Zealand Breakers Vs Illawarra Hawks (Live)
4.00 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19
4.30 Wrestling: Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
7.00 Basketball: Fiba World Basketball 2019
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 Basketball: National Basketball League 2018/19 – NBL Slam
8.30 Basketball: Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Westports Malaysia Dragons Vs CLS Knights Indonesia (Live)
10.30 Wrestling: Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Unikitty
6.30 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 Unikitty
7.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Unikitty
8.15 Teen Titans Go!
9.00 Unikitty
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 Unikitty/10.15 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernobots
11.00 Unikitty
11.15 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Unikitty
12.15 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 Unikitty
1.15 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 Craig Of The Creek
3.00 Unikitty
3.15 OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 Unikitty
4.15 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Unikitty
5.15 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Craig Of The Creek
6.00 Unikitty
6.15 We Bare Bears – Bear Party
6.30 Unikitty
6.45 Teen Titans Go! Vs The Powerpuff Girls/7.00 Unikitty
7.15 Clarence
7.30 Grizzly And The Lemmings
7.55 The Heroic Quest Of The Valiant Prince Ivandoe
8.00 Unikitty
8.15 We Bare Bears
9.00 Unikitty
9.15 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 MacGyver 2
6.50 Seal Team
7.40 American Ninja Warrior 7
9.25 MacGyver 2/10.20 Seal Team
11.10 The Amazing Race Asia 5
PM
1.00 Quantico 3
1.55 American Ninja Warrior 7
2.50 Seal Team
3.40 The Amazing Race Asia 5
5.30 Seal Team 2
6.25 Asia's Got Talent 3
10.00 MacGyver 3
10.55 Asia's Got Talent 3

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 The Carbonaro Effect 2
6.50 Major Crimes 5
7.40 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow

8.30 Person Of Interest 4
9.20 The Flash 4
10.10 The Carbonaro Effect 2
11.00 Almost Genius
11.50 Lethal Weapon 3
PM
12.40 Race To The Scene
1.30 The Big Bang Theory 9
1.55 Friends 9
2.25 The Carbonaro Effect 2
3.15 Almost Genius/4.05 The Flash 4
4.50 Person Of Interest 4
5.40 Major Crimes 5
6.30 The Flash 4
7.15 The Big Bang Theory 9
7.40 Friends 9/8.10 Almost Genius
9.00 The Intern
11.15 The Big Bang Theory 9
11.40 Friends 9

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 14
7.15 Mr Bean/7.45 Most Ridiculous 2
8.10 Amazingness
8.35 Mr Bean
9.05 Caraoke Showdown
9.30 Just For Laughs Gags 14
9.55 Hot In Cleveland 2
10.45 The Relationship Show
11.30 An SNL Valentine's Special
PM
12.05 Above Average Presents
12.10 The Daily Show 24
12.35 The Goldbergs 5
1.25 Hot In Cleveland 6
2.10 Above Average Presents
2.20 Saturday Night Live 43
3.10 The Burn With Jeff Ross 2
3.30 Above Average Presents
3.35 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle II: War Of The Words
4.35 The Goldbergs 5
5.25 Hot In Cleveland 6
6.15 The Daily Show 24
6.45 Your Face Or Mine 4
7.10 Amazingness
7.35 The Relationship Show
8.25 An SNL Valentine's Special
9.05 The Goldbergs 5
9.55 Hot In Cleveland 6
10.40 Inside Amy Schumer
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 Above Average Presents
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Taste Of Love
7.00 First Love/8.00 King Of Blaze
9.00 Eagle And Youngster
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 King Of Blaze
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife/9.10 First Love
10.00 King Of Blaze
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
Your phone might start to heat up from overuse, so try to take a break every now and then.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
Try to put off big decisions. Make sure you have the information you need before you make the call.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
That big brain of yours is making life much more interesting for those around you.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)
Things start to go your way once you shake off this bad mood and get back to what really matters.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)
Spend time getting to know new people. You are likely to need them for something important in the future.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
Your mental energy is just right for reacting quickly to changes, but you may feel a bit disgruntled.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)
Try not to push anyone too hard and everyone should get along great.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
Business matters require greater attention than usual, so make sure you have all the details covered.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
Someone close is talking the talk, but is he willing to walk the walk? Show him how it is done.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
Get exercise, use your political strength and do whatever else it takes to complete your projects.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
Your brain is one of your sexiest assets. Use it to its fullest extent and you might land some attention.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)
Try not to get too involved with projects that are detail-oriented. If you must, get some help.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Weekdays With Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Weekdays With Charmaine Yee
4.00 On The Drive Home With Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 Glenn & The Flying Dutchman
10.00 The Middy Brew With Charmaine Phua
PM
1.00 Afternoon Tune Up With Cheryl Miles
4.00 The Weekday Getaway With Divian Nair
8.00 Love Songs With Simon Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kevin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.17am/7.21pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 2.10pm/1.46am

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 4.54am (2.6m), 11.52am (1.1m), 6.28pm (2.1m), 11.35pm (1.6m). Desaru: 3.58am (2.4m), 11.01am (1.2m), 6.05pm (2.3m), 11.33pm (1.9m). Port Dickson: 12.39am (2m), 7.17am (1m), 12.39pm (1.7m), 7.03pm (0.7m). Mersing: 3.19am (2.4m), 10.16am (1.2m), 5.49pm (2.6m), 11.40pm (2.1m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 5.58am (2.6m), 1.15pm (0.9m), 8.45pm (2.2m). Desaru: 4.46am (2.3m), 12.18pm (1.1m), 7.56pm (2.4m). Port Dickson: 2.28am (2m), 8.57am (1.1m), 2.20pm (1.6m), 9.08pm (0.7m). Mersing: 4am (2.4m), 11.7am (1.1m), 7.17pm (2.8m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

Crime thriller leads in nods for Hong Kong Film Awards

HONG KONG • Hong Kong crime thriller Project Gutenberg garnered a whopping 17 nominations at the Hong Kong Film Awards, which were announced on Tuesday.

The movie, on the story of a crime syndicate involved in money counterfeiting and its mysterious mastermind, was directed by Felix Chong, who is best known for writing the Infernal Affairs film trilogy (2002 to 2003). The movie stars Aaron Kwok and Chow Yun Fat.

It received nods for Best Film, Best Director (for Chong), Best Actor (both Kwok and Chow), Best Actress (Zhang Jingchu), Best Supporting Actor (Liu Kai Chi) and Best Supporting Actress (Catherine Chau).

The only two categories it missed out on were Best New Performer and Best New Director.

Men On The Dragon, a movie about four middle-aged men each dealing with a personal crisis, has the second-highest number of nominations at 11, including Best Film, Best Director (Sunny Chan), Best Actor (Francis Ng), Best Supporting Actor (Kenny Wong and Poon Chan Leung) and Best Supporting Actress (Jennifer Yu).

Others nominated for Best Film included Operation Red Sea, a Chinese military action film loosely based on the evacuation of Chinese citizens and other foreign nationals during the Yemeni Civil War; Three

Husbands, the last film in director Fruit Chan's Prostitute Trilogy; and Still Human, a movie about a disabled man and his domestic helper in Hong Kong.

The directors of these three films – Dante Lam, Fruit Chan and Oliver Chan – are also vying for the Best Director award. Oliver Chan is also up for Best New Director, together with Sunny Chan of Men On The Dragon.

Anthony Wong, who plays the disabled man in Still Human, is up for the Best Actor award. Crisel Consunji, who plays the domestic helper, is up for Best Actress and Best New Performer.

Wong has won the Best Actor award twice. Kwok and Chow, two



Project Gutenberg stars Chow Yun Fat (far left) and Aaron Kwok, who are both up for the Best Actor award.
PHOTO: MM2 ENTERTAINMENT

of his rivals in the category, are also former winners.

Chinese actress Chloe Maayan is up for Best Actress for her role in Three Husbands. Beside Zhang and Consunji, Charlene Choi (The Lady Improper) is also nominated in the category. Choi, one-half of the Can-

topop duo Twins, has been nominated twice for the award.

Yu, who was nominated for Best Supporting Actress, is also nominated for Best Actress for her role in Distinction.

The 38th Hong Kong Film Awards will be held on April 14.

Katy Perry pulls shoes resembling blackface

NEW YORK • Singer Katy Perry has apologised after shoes in her fashion line, Katy Perry Collections, drew outrage for resembling blackface.

It is the latest brand to pull offensive designs during this month, when Black History Month is observed.

The shoes, which featured large red lips, a wide triangular nose and blue eyes, were released last summer and came in nine colourways, including black.

When photos of the black shoes began circulating on social media, they prompted an immediate backlash.

A joint statement from Perry and her partner Global Brands Group said the shoes were part of a collection "envisioned as a nod to modern art and surrealism".

"I was saddened when it was brought to my attention that it was being compared to painful images reminiscent of blackface," the statement said. "Our intention was never to inflict any pain. We have immediately removed them from katyperrycollections.com."

The shoes also disappeared from department store chain Dillard's website and they were not available at Lord & Taylor and Macy's on Tuesday.

The outcry followed a particularly clueless year for fashion designers.

More recently, both Gucci and Adidas apologised and pulled products widely viewed as racist: an US\$890 (S\$1,206) black Gucci knit top with a balaclava-style collar that covered half the face, the cutout for the mouth framed by large red lips; and entirely white Adidas shoes that were meant to commemorate Black History Month.

Film-maker Spike Lee announced on Instagram last week he would no longer wear Prada or Gucci "until they hire some black designers", adding that the companies "don't have a clue when it comes to racist, blackface hateful imagery". NYTIMES



Pop singer Miley Cyrus attended the premiere of her husband Liam Hemsworth's latest film Isn't It Romantic on his behalf as he was unwell.
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Miley Cyrus stands in for actor husband at film premiere

LOS ANGELES • Newly married pop singer Miley Cyrus stood in for her Hollywood actor husband Liam Hemsworth on Monday, attending the premiere of his latest film Isn't It Romantic on his behalf as he was unwell.

Dressed in a red floor-length gown, complete with a train, the Wrecking Ball chart-topper posed for pictures and chatted with journalists alongside Hemsworth's co-stars in the romantic comedy, Rebel Wilson and Priyanka Chopra.

Asked what was the most romantic thing she had ever done, Cyrus, who married Hemsworth in a quiet family wedding in December, said: "Maybe it's what I'm doing – I'm here... All dressed up with no date to promote my man's movie, so that's pretty good. He owes me."

Cyrus, who performed with Dolly Parton at Sunday's Grammy Awards, did not give details about Hemsworth, just saying "he's down. He's not feeling well right now".

"Entertainers have a really hard time taking care of ourselves," Cyrus said.

The movie was extremely important to Hemsworth, "so I had to be here to represent it", she added.

Hemsworth, known for The Hunger Games films (2012 to 2015), apologised to fans for not making it to the Los Angeles premiere on social media and thanked his wife for stepping in.

"Sorry I couldn't make it... tonight, guys. Been dealing with some pretty annoying health stuff the last couple days. Lucky I have the best girl in the world to represent for me!" the actor wrote on Instagram. REUTERS

On social media



WEEKEND WITH GAL PALS: Pop singer Selena Gomez (left), 26, who was back on social media last month after a four-month hiatus, continued her return on Instagram as she posted photos of her spending last weekend with female pals at her best friend Courtney Barry's bachelorette trip, at a beach in Mexico. She captioned the pictures: "My best friend is getting married, so we celebrated her! Future Mrs Lopez." Ms Barry (right) is the founder and president of a social media and marketing agency and is due to wed her fiance Sam Lopez.
PHOTO: SELENA GOMEZ/INSTAGRAM

Aziz Ansari addresses sexual misconduct accusation

NEW YORK • Aziz Ansari has spent much of his recent stand-up comedy tour only peripherally referencing the accusation of sexual misconduct early last year that took him out of the public eye.

That changed on Monday night, when he took the stage in New York City at the Village Underground, an offshoot of the Comedy Cellar.

According to entertainment portal Vulture's Mr Jesse David Fox, who was in the audience for the set, Ansari said he had delayed discussing the accusation because "it's a terrifying thing to talk about" and he wanted to take time to process what he wanted to say.

He continued: "But you know, after a year, how I feel about it is, I hope it was a step forward. It made me think a lot and I hope I've become a better person."

Ansari has given no interviews about the incident, details of which were published in a piece on Babe.net: an account of an anonymous woman who wrote that Ansari had misbehaved with her on a date and pressured her into sexual activity, despite her hesitation and refusals.

The article was criticised for its reporting methods, but nonetheless set off a debate about dating culture and the boundaries of the #MeToo movement during its height, particularly given Ansari's reputation as an outspoken advocate for women.

At Village Underground, Ansari told the crowd the accusation made him fear that he could never do stand-up again, but that he hoped there would be some positive results from the discussion that arose. NYTIMES

tabla!
THE HEARTBEAT OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

EXCHANGE CIGARETTE BUTTS FOR BEER AT GOA WASTE BARS

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Which Upcoming BTO should I buy?

SRX
com.sg
Right Home. Right Price.

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- BTO Pricing Forecast
- BTO news
- Past BTO Launches
- BTO Buying Guide

srx.com.sg/hdb/BTO

thenewpaper.

Makansutra

K F Seetoh brings you the best in hawker and street food

The best ingredients
tnp.sg/lifestyle